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JUNE / JULY / AUGUST 1993



THE

# Preacher's

MAGAZINE

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THE PROBLEM  
OF FEELING  
INSIGNIFICANT

---

THE PRETTY GOOD  
PASTOR

---

WHAT I LEARNED  
ABOUT CARING  
FROM FUNERAL  
DIRECTORS

---

ON HOLD

---



*Evangelism  
is not  
just talking about  
Jesus;  
it is  
taking people to  
Jesus.*

*—Peter J. Gomes*



# KEPT SAFE

## 2 Thessalonians 1

by Randal E. Denny

Spokane, Wash.



Christians in the young church at Thessalonica felt the awful sting of persecution. Paul wrote back to encourage them with a profound sense of security: "To: The church of Thessalonica—kept safe in God our Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:1, TLB). Let Paul's words bolster your sagging spirits.

**First, when you pass through the tough times, hold steady in the Lord.**

*Keep your faith growing:* "We . . . thank God for you . . . because your faith is growing more and more" (v. 3). Faith is more than a passive reception of God's grace. Faith acts on the basis of commitment to God. This "growing" faith increases with each passing episode and experience. In Hebrews 11 stands a mighty list of great men and women of faith. Every one of them faced obstacles that required a growing faith.

*Keep your love increasing:* "because . . . the love every one of you has for each other is increasing" (v. 4). The tough times drew them more closely together. This "increasing" love spread like a prairie fire. Nothing is more attractive to the good news of Jesus than Christian love that reaches out to include more and more people.

*Keep your patience enduring:* "We boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring" (v. 4). "Persecutions" are those sufferings we endure because we are Christians; "trials" are those sufferings we endure because we live in a hostile world. The English word *patience* comes from two Latin words: *Patior*, which means "I suffer"; and *sensio*, which means "with sense." We can face suffering sensibly—and in God's time our sufferings will make sense if we are patient.

Corrie ten Boom, imprisoned by the Nazis, said in a letter: "Once I asked to be freed, but the Lord said, 'My grace is sufficient for you.' I am continuously looking at Him and trying not to be impatient. I won't be here one minute longer than God deems necessary. Pray for me that I can wait for His timing."<sup>1</sup>

**Second, when you pass through tough times, let God use your sufferings. Keep two facts in mind.**

*Remember that God is right:* "All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering . . . He will . . . give relief to you who are troubled" (vv. 5-7). God will not waste your suffering. Ultimately our trials work for us, not against us. Often out of your greatest suffering will come your greatest ministry! God promises relief. Paul's word for "relief" means "not under pressure"—the opposite of his word for "trials." It describes the slackening of tension of a taut bow-string, a loosening of the strain from persecutions and trials. Paul declared, "Therefore we do not lose heart. . . . For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor. 4:16-17).

*Remember that God is just:* "He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you" (v. 6). God holds everyone accountable for his actions. The fact of divine retribution and reward says that life is significant. Our actions have lasting consequences. Jesus is coming back to settle the accounts and "to receive praise and admiration because of all he has done for his people, his saints" (v. 10, TLB).

**Third, when you pass through tough times, depend on prayer.** Paul added, "With this in mind, we constantly pray for you" (v. 11).

*Pray that God will make you the person He desires.* Our spiritual advancements come through prayer. That's why the devil never bothers to say, "Don't pray." He merely suggests, "Don't pray now!"

We pastors should pray that God may count us worthy of His calling—not out of duty, but out of gratitude that exclaims, "Thank You, Father, for loving me!" Only as God is at work in us can He deem us worthy: "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13).

*Pray that God will be glorified in you:* "We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 12). Pray that you don't have to wait until you get to heaven to glorify the Lord. Ask Him to transform you until your life brings glory to Him in this world. Jesus' reputation rests in your hands. Like it or not, people judge Jesus by how we live.

A. J. Gossip preached in a sermon to his congregation in Glasgow: "When the saints go marching in, the angels will look at one another in sheer amazement and exclaim, 'How very like Jesus these people are!'"<sup>2</sup> Paul affirmed, "Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

When you pass through the tough times, you are "kept safe" in the Lord. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear" (Ps. 46:1-2). ■

1. Corrie ten Boom, *Corrie ten Boom's Prison Letters* (Carmel, N.Y.: Guideposts ed. Fleming H. Revell Co., 1975), 18-19.

2. Sydney Martin, *Beacon Bible Expositions*, vol. 10, ed. William M. Greathouse and Willard H. Taylor (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1977), 74.

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*Randal E. Denny*

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# The Problem of Feeling Insignificant

by Charles R. Millhuff

Olathe, Kans.

If I were the devil and I were going to try to discourage you and break your spirit, I would look into my toolbox for tools I could use to bring spiritual destruction. Among all the tools that I have at my disposal, if I were the devil, I could most effectively use the tool of insignificance. If I could make you feel insignificant, I could eventually get you to the point where you would become discouraged. Your discouragement would eventually become anger, and your anger would become bitterness. We all know that bitterness is a major battle of the war. When you lose that battle, the war is pretty well over, and you have lost. The carnal mind has defeated the godly mind, and you have bought into another world order that has nothing to do with the kingdom of God.

If I wanted to discourage you as you go home from this great conference, I would somehow make you feel as though you don't count. I would make you feel as though you're insignificant. I would do anything that I could to make you leave the building tonight and say within your own soul, "I really don't measure up." If I could do that to you, I would have you right where I want you. I could neutralize every wonderful thing that has happened in these last three days.

I have felt insignificant. In fact, most of the things that I have done of which I'm not real proud are things that I have done in reaction to a feeling of insignificance. Insignificance is a very effective tool of Satan's. It mocks the grace of God. It makes a lie out of the Book. It makes the King of Kings and Lord of Lords seem puny in your life. It is a terrible sin. It has

nothing to do with the sanctified crowd.

I stood on the front porch of Billy Sunday's home in Winona Lake, Ind. Just down the road was the great tabernacle built to house the crowds to whom he preached. Billy Sunday had such tremendous crowds that there were no buildings or auditoriums big enough to hold the crowds, so they built great tabernacles. The last standing tabernacle is in Winona Lake, Ind. The thorny piles are still there, the massive amounts of seats, the sounding board above the pulpit—for there were no microphones and loudspeakers in that day.

I stood on Billy Sunday's front porch and said to myself, "What have I really done?" In his home, I handled letters from presidents. I saw his baseball contracts. I walked out on that front porch where that famous man walked so many times, and I reflected on my own life and ministry and what it's all really become.

My wife, Jeannie, and I a few days ago were in Pasadena, Calif., and we went to see the home of Uncle Bud Robinson. Again I stood on the front porch from which he left to go on so many of his wonderful evangelistic tours. Bud Robinson, the most famous Nazarene preacher who ever lived! And I thought to myself, What

have I really done? The truth of the matter is that I've preached to about 100 people most nights. Satan began to work on me.

I heard a baffling statistic the other day. It came out of Dr. Leighton Ford's ministry. He said that half the world has never heard the name of Jesus once. And I seem to be doing so little about it. Do you ever feel that way?

To that one who might feel that way, I want to preach to you tonight. I want to read to you tonight about one of God's "nobodies." When you open the Bible and read about the people whom God used, you say over and over again, "How odd of God! He does almost everything the way I would have never done it."

This is about one of my favorite Bible characters. The story begins at Judg. 6:11. Gideon threshed wheat by the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. Now the bondage was so severe the man couldn't even make his lunch out in the open. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him and said unto him, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour" (v. 12, KJV). And Gideon said unto him, "Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" (v. 13, KJV).

Have you ever asked that question? I have. "And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites" (v. 13, KJV).

The angel of the Lord didn't buy into Gideon's negative thinking. He said, "That kind of talk is not going to influence my dreams for you. I'm not going to reduce my dreams to your



sense of inadequacy." He didn't get into a discussion about what he had and had not done. He just launched into another wonderful promise.

"And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" (v. 14, KJV).

Gideon didn't hear a word that He said. He just launched into his sorry, self-effacing approach to his situation. "And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (v. 15, KJV). In other words, "I come from a poor family. I'm not well connected. And I'm the poorest part of that poor proposition. Why in the world are You coming to me?"

That didn't influence God Almighty one single bit. He launched again into the promises of the wonderful things He was going to do with Gideon. "And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man" (v. 16, KJV).

I want to preach on this very simple subject tonight: "Jesus is all that I need." I want to give you four simple ideas to carry home. I can't go into all that Gideon got involved in, but it is a remarkable story. Gideon was just a red-faced farm boy, but God used him.

### **I. God uses and depends upon common people.**

You say, "But you don't understand how common I am. You don't understand how ordinary I am. I hear these speakers telling of such wonderful things, and it sounds good for them. But you have no idea how ordinary I am. I come to a meeting like this, and I gasp in wonder; but then I just go home feeling insignificant."

This fellow called Gideon, preparing his lunch in a winepress, was just a red-faced farm boy.

However, God thought Gideon was unusual because Gideon would be honest with God. Gideon told God how he really felt. He told Him what was really going on in his life. Oh, my dear friend, speak to God. He loves you. There's nothing you can do to make God stop loving you. Do you understand that? Or, to put it another way, there's nothing I can do to make God stop loving me. God is hopeless-

ly in love with you. God's grace is in place. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. Our salvation is bought and paid for. It isn't something God does for us, but something He has already completed for us. We come and receive so great a salvation. Hallelujah, we are under His wings, safely abiding in His place of wonderful, saving grace. I wouldn't have called Gideon, but God did.

If I could make  
you feel  
insignificant,  
you would  
become  
discouraged.

I think of David. One songwriter put it this way: "Only a boy named David, only a shepherd boy." David was a hayseed out in his father's fields, watching the sheep. He killed a lion with his bare hands and killed a bear with his bare hands. And the worst of it is that no one knew about it. You do something really great, and no one knows about it. That's discouraging. Some of you here tonight have done some great things. You've killed some lions with your bare hands, and you've killed some bears with your bare hands, and it didn't get printed in the *Herald of Holiness*. But God knows about it.

David was sent to the army camp with some cheese and crackers—just a little shepherd boy, a little spindly-legged teenager, and he goes skipping to the big army camp. His brothers said to him, "What are you doing here?" They were embarrassed with their little brother's presence.

David told his brothers, "My father sent me." Hallelujah! That's the justification for what we're doing—our Father has sent us. This little David, however, was to eventually slay the great giant, Goliath. This David was to become the king of all of Israel. This David became a part of the

prophecy that says that out of this David would flow a fountain for remission of all sin. I wouldn't pick David, but God did.

I think of Mary and Joseph. I wouldn't have picked them in a thousand years. We would have had a search committee. We would have brought in the experts. We would have had a Gallup poll. We would have figured it out and scientifically designed it all. Surely we wouldn't have picked Mary, a little nondescript teenager, or Joseph, a carpenter with sawdust in his sandals and shavings in his garments. He was virtually uneducated; can you imagine that? Yet, into their home came the greatest gift that any home has ever received. For they were to become the mother and the foster parent of the Lamb of God, who indeed did take away the sins of the world.

When you start telling me how ordinary you are, I say, "Watch out. You're the kind of person God has been changing the world with." Hallelujah!

God uses and depends upon common people. You wonder, What was there about these people that made them unusual? You're perceptive—they were unusual. Here's the thing that made them unusual. They were God's persons, in God's place, doing God's will, in God's time. They were where they were supposed to be, doing what they were supposed to be doing, and doing it the way God wanted it done. God's people in God's place, doing God's will in God's time!

### **II. When you are living in the center of God's will, you're always doing far more good than you think you are.**

We judge so many things by other situations. I have found that when I get involved in comparisons, it brings a lot of consternation into my life. When you're living in the center of God's will, you're always doing far more good than you think you are.

The man who ordained me into the Christian ministry was Dr. Hardy C. Powers. God bless his great memory. He told me about a preacher who was getting discouraged. Now you're not supposed to get discouraged—but he was getting discouraged. He had decided to give up the ministry. He was an itinerant evangelist, and it



hadn't gone well. Critics had thrown rotten eggs and tomatoes at him. They wouldn't let him use the blacksmith shop or the schoolhouse for his crusade, and they burned down his brush arbor. Things had gotten real rough. He'd had enough of it. Getting on the train, he was going home to Iowa to go back into farming.

Bitterness is a major battle.

Enough's enough; anyone knows that. But as he was going toward home on the train, the train tracks began to talk to him. They started going, "Clickety-clack, clickety-clack, get off the train, pray about it, get off the train, pray about it, clickety-clack, clickety-clack, get off the train, and pray about it."

Do you think that God can talk through railroad tracks? I do. God can use all kinds of things to talk to you. One old guy in the Old Testament was in such a sorry shape that God used a jackass to talk to him. Can you imagine being so sorry that all you can understand is "Hee haw"? God can get it to where you understand it. Amen! I tell you, God has reached into my life and given me some lessons that I could understand.

So the old evangelist said, "Well, that makes sense."

I'll give you some good advice: Never make a big decision when you're down. Don't change churches when you're down. Don't quit your job when you're down. You don't have to make a big decision when you're down. "There is safety . . . in the multitude of counsellors" (Prov. 11:14, KJV). Find a few folk that you trust who know how to pray about it. To that dear brother or sister who's sitting here tonight and you're so discouraged, I want to walk up to you, put my arms around you, and say, "Hold on a little longer. Don't make that decision right now."

So that evangelist got off the train in a little Western town and carried his heavy valises into the little one-story hotel. He said, "I want to get a

room here." The clerk gave him a key to room 37.

He got the key to room 37. But on his way to 37, he passed room 35, and the door was open a little. Now we're not supposed to do this—but most of us do. There's just something about it, you've got to look in there. He looked in the door. There next to the bed was an old fellow praying. He had an old sweat-soaked felt hat on the floor. The plaid in his shirt was almost gone because it had been washed so much. His blue jeans had long since lost their blue. Obviously he was a simple old rancher, and he was praying right out loud.

The old evangelist just stood there and watched—it was fascinating. As this old rancher was praying, he was saying, "O God, thank You for helping me get that old cow to market. Thank You, God, for the crops last year. Thank You for the simple little farm that I sharecrop on. Thank You for bringing my wife wellness last winter. And thank You, God, for the preacher that comes to our church once every month. Thank You, God, for the health You've given me."

And he kept praising the Lord. Everyone knows that the Lord inhabits the praises of His people. And the glory began to roll off the door and get on this poor, sorry, discouraged preacher.

He went down to room 37 and opened the door. He took off his old cellulose collar and took off his coat and bowed down on his bed. There he began to pray. He began to thank God for all the things He had done for him. He thanked Him for His salvation and thanked Him for the opportunities that He had to preach. It wasn't long until the glory began to break loose and began to roll into his own soul. Soon he got all the way through, hallelujah! He got into the bed and slept the sleep of the dead. He awakened the next morning, got back on the train, and went the other direction.

Then Dr. Powers told me, "Chuck, that man saw tens of thousands swept into the Kingdom before he died."

But the end of that story hasn't been told yet. For one of these days, around the great sea of glass, sitting there on the great throne, God is going to be passing out the rewards. I

believe in a doctrine of rewards. God is going to call out those who have done things that merit these kinds of things. There's going to be a great, huge stack of rewards. God is going to call out the name of the little, unknown, nondescript cowboy. And he's going to say, "There's been some terrible mistake here. Why? Where could I have ever earned all of that?" He'll come waddling up to the throne, his old bowed legs poking out the side of a robe washed white in the Blood of the Lamb, blinking his eyes like a bullfrog in a hailstorm. He will say, "But Father, there's been a terrible mistake. Where could I have earned all of that?"

Then the Father's going to say, "You earned all of that in room 35, when you were God's man, in God's place, doing God's will, in God's time."

Half the world has never heard the name of Jesus.

My friend, when you're serving God and living in the center of His will, you're always doing far more good than you think you are. Hallelujah! You have no idea what that letter meant when you sent it over yonder. When you bought a hamburger for that child who had gotten in real trouble. You said, "I believe in you anyway." When you took a cherry pie next door. When you did something for someone, and you've long since forgotten it, it changed everything about his life.

Have you heard of the man named Dr. Billy Graham? Do you know the name of the man that was preaching on the night he got saved? That doesn't seem fair, does it? He was an old, rough, Carolina preacher by the name of Mordecai Hamm. You'll never see a big Billy Graham Crusade sign that says, "Saved under the preaching of Mordecai Hamm." But I'll tell you right now, one of these days, when the rewards are being passed out,

you'll see Billy Graham, but you'll really see Mordecai Hamm, who was faithful to one of those tent revivals down in Charlotte. The man whom I consider to be among the greatest evangelists that ever lived was saved along with his buddy, Grady Wilson. Yes. Number one, God calls, and God depends upon common folks. And second, when you're living in the center of God's will, you're always doing far more good than you think you are.

### III. God's people must ask Him for help because He really cares.

That is His system. If Satan can make you feel insignificant, and if he can get you to buy into that deception, you'll feel, "I don't count here. I'm really nobody there. And of course, over there they don't really know what I'm all about. So then, why would God listen to me?" So your praying is anemic, your faith is shallow, you struggle from one hard case to the next. And when Satan can get you to buy into his lie, he has broken your prayer life. He has unplugged the cord that's connected to the main locks.

## "Where are the miracles?"

Your need is not enough to move the hand of God. God says, "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7, NASB). God wills that we understand our franchise in grace, that we understand the power and the covenant that God has given us in Christ during His dispensation of the Holy Spirit. This insignificance factor will kill you spiritually. I believe in the absolute destruction of the carnal self principle. But even that doesn't bring you to a position where you grovel in some kind of self-defacing misery.

There is a paradox here. There is a tension here in the theology. I must ask Him. I must believe that He wants to hear me. I must pray prayers of confession. I must know that it's all right to talk to God about everything. I must say to Him, "Father, I didn't do

it real well today. I want You to forgive me." There is no revival without confession. I confess to you that I have a lot of personal needs. I apologize to anyone tonight that I have ever offended. I didn't mean to. I was probably trying to survive. I confess that to you. I must pray prayers of confession. I must come and pray prayers of intercession. I must believe that God hears me and that I'm significant enough that I can actually pray for you and beat on the door of my neighbor till he brings bread to feed my hungry friend. I must pray prayers of petition. I must come against Satan in the name of Jesus. I must, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, come against evil spirits that would oppress me. I cannot live with this oppression.

Do you understand what I'm saying? If you leave this conference comparing yourself with some speaker here, and if that comparison brings about a kind of insignificance, then you've played right into Satan's deception. Of course, you can't talk to God because you don't feel like you're at a level that you can talk to God. There are no levels in the kingdom of God; there are only flocks.

God calls. God depends upon common people. When you are in the center of God's will, you're always doing far more good than you think you are. God's people must ask Him for help because He cares. That is His system: "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7, KJV). And again, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. 7:7, KJV).

### IV. Jesus is all you need.

My friend Stuart McWhirter used to crystallize our Christology lesson. This Christ isn't some keen intellectual, appealing only to old women in tennis shoes. He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. The kingdoms of this world are becoming the kingdom of our God, and He shall reign forever. We're on the winning side. He never promised we'd be winning at the half, but He did tell us we'd win the ball game. Hallelujah! It's none of the devil's business. Jesus is all that I need.

I love the words of Fanny Crosby's powerful hymn:

*Thou, the Spring of all my comfort,*

*More than life to me.*

*Whom have I on earth beside Thee?*

*Whom in heaven but Thee?*

I wouldn't have called Gideon—but God did.

We're talking tonight about walking into a harvest field of soul-winning. But if I've allowed Satan to abuse me to the point that I feel totally unable or unworthy, he has neutralized me. But Jesus is going to take care of us. Jesus can take care of the Church. I'm not just a Nazarene, I'm one of the best Nazarenes you'll ever meet. But my strength is not in that affiliation, as much as it means to me. It's in this Jesus Christ that I know and the glory that He brings into my own life.

Many years ago, I was preaching in Clovis, N.Mex., long before they had built the very beautiful building in which they now worship. That is a wonderful church. Across town in another revival was Dr. Robert G. Lee, one of the greatest pastor-evangelists the North American continent has ever known. He pastored many years in Memphis. He had services that began at 7:30 P.M. Ours began at 6 P.M., so by finishing our services, I could go over there and hear him about the time he'd start to preach.

What an experience it was! I heard him preach his world-famous message, "Payday Someday." I had a conference with him on Saturday morning. I wanted to meet this great man, author of more than 80 books. At this time he was in his 80s. I said, "Dr. Lee, I'm just beginning in this business. Could you give me some good advice?"

He said, "Yes, I'll give you two pieces of advice, young man. Number one, if I could live my life over, I would have loved the people more. Second and most important, whatever happens to the Church of the Naz-

arene, or whatever happens to the Southern Baptist Convention, or whatever happens to the United States of America, never, ever forget, young man, that Jesus is all that you need."

Then Dr. Lee told me this story. He went out visiting one day. He was the pastor of a church at the time that had in excess of 10,000 members. He said, "In those days I drove a Studebaker."

He said, "I went to visit a very, very wealthy family. They lived in a very beautiful, Southern mansion in Memphis. It was cold wintertime. We had a very cold spell. I drove up to the address and walked up to the very beautiful lawns and manicured hedges and stood there in the shadow of the great colonnades on that beautiful colonial home. I rapped on the great brass door knocker. The door opened, and a servant brought me into the vestibule of that home, took off my coat, and led me into the living room. It had beautiful oriental rugs on the floor and hand-painted oils on the wall and, in the middle of the winter, fresh-cut flowers sitting in a beautiful vase on the piano. I was in a very, very opulent situation.

"Into the room came the lady of the home, so lovely, so beautiful, so Southern, so gracious. 'Oh, Dr. Lee, Dr. Lee, to what do I owe this pleasure?'"

In the center  
of God's will  
you are doing  
more good  
than you  
think.

Dr. Lee said, "I talked with her for a while. Then I got down to business. The fact of the matter is they hadn't been in church for several weeks, even months. They'd made a sizable pledge on the new stained-glass window in the new church we were about to finish. We were at the point

that the window had to be paid for. And I got finally down to the reason for my call. She began giving all the reasons as to why they hadn't been there, how tough things had been, how they'd had to sell one of their boats, and how they had had to make all these sacrifices."

Dr. Lee commented to me, "You know, son, if there's anything worse than a poor man trying to act rich, it's a rich man trying to act poor."

Dr. Lee continued, "She was so ungrateful for all that God had done for them. I stayed and did the best I could and then prayed a prayer of blessing on her and on her home. I prayed for God's best in their lives and left the home of that gross ingrate.

Never make a  
big decision  
when you're  
down.

"I got into my car and went to my next call, which was out in the country, down a little country road. Finally, I turned off and went down another little road and stopped in front of a little tiny house. I got out of my car and walked up the frozen rut that was her front walk, through a gate that hung by one hinge from a fence. I walked up to the door and was about to knock on the door of this little, godly widow woman, when through the door, I heard her in there singing. She was singing something like this:

*All that I need He will always be,  
All that I need till His face I see,  
All that I need through eternity,  
Jesus is all I need."*

—James Rowe

Dr. Lee knocked on the door, and she stopped singing. Dr. Lee said, "She stood there with the door open, a glow on her face, the presence of God all over her.

"She said, 'Dr. Lee, Dr. Lee, please come in and sit down.'"

He said, "I went into that simple home and sat down on an old rocking

chair that had been wired together so much it was more wire than rocker.

Why would  
God listen  
to me?

"I looked at her and said, 'Little mother, what makes you so happy?'"

"'Oh,' she said, 'Dr. Lee, last night I ran out of coal. You know I can't take in laundry and ironing like I once did. So all I could do was pile on the blankets as my little stove grew ashes, gray, and then black. I'm alone now, you know. Dr. Lee, do you know that man who sells produce in the summer and sells coal in the winter? He came by my house today. He said he just felt like he ought to come. He started hauling coal into my house and got my little stove going again. He piled the coal in next to the little furnace. He kept bringing it till he filled up the box next to the little stove. He filled up my coal bin behind the house. He kept coming and coming till I thought he was going to bury me in it. Dr. Lee, I can't help it. Every time I walk by that little stove, red and rosy and feel the warmth of it, I can't help it. I just start to sing, 'All that I need He will always be.'"

Dr. Lee said, "I left that home where the walls were shimmering with the glory of God. I realized that I'd been with one of God's children—a queen, in fact."

When I was asked to preach at this conference, I prayed about what I should do. Shall I try to save the church in 30 minutes? God said, "No, you've tried that before. We don't need that again."

I said, "What should I do?" I felt so impressed to preach a simple sermon to try and give somebody a boost. There might be someone who would say, "Chuck, I'd love to come to an altar tonight. I'm not a bad person. I've just been beat up along the way. I've gotten a new grip on it."

You say, "I'm so common." You're just the kind of a person God has called here.

# The Pretty Good Pastor

by Jack Connell

Syracuse, N.Y.

**W**e live in the age of the superstar pastor. Their names ring with recognition that comes from being a celebrity: Maxwell, Hybels, Swindoll, MacArthur, Schuller. They serve huge churches. They have incredible amounts of giftedness, energy, creativity, and vision. They are master communicators. Their names fill the "marquees" of the evangelical world—book covers, conference brochures, and videotapes.

I'm thankful for the ministry of these superstar pastors. They challenge me. They inspire me. They help me dream big dreams. They powerfully impact our world for Christ. Yet, as thankful as I am for them, I also live with the realization that I will probably never join their esteemed ranks. I will probably never pastor a huge church. It is highly unlikely that I will ever write a best-seller. I doubt that you will ever see my picture on the cover of a Christian magazine. The closest I ever get to fame is when I stand next to the town supervisor and pray at our Little League opening ceremonies. I'm not a superstar pastor; but I'm a pretty good pastor.

And I'm not alone. Most of us in the clerical ranks are, in fact, pretty good pastors. We pastor churches of about average size. We possess average amounts of creativity and vision and giftedness. We are fair communicators. We don't speak at conferences; we attend them. Lots of them. At each one, we listen to the superstar pastors tell us how we can become superpastors. We love their ideas, get inspired, and rush home to try them ourselves. More often than not, we get discouraged because it seems to take a superstar pastor to carry out a superstar pastor's ideas.

And we're not superstar pastors; but we're pretty good pastors.

The problem for us is that when we compare ourselves to the superstar pastors, it's sometimes easy to think we aren't good for much. Or that we aren't talented enough for the ministry. Or that our ministry is insignificant. Or that we can't contribute much to people's lives. Or that we're forever consigned to some kind of second-class status in the church. We sometimes read the parable of the talents and wonder what it would have been like to be the person who got 10 talents. We feel like the poor soul who only got 1. Like him, we sometimes want to bury it.

But take heart, pretty good pastors! We may not be as gifted as the superstars, but there is much we can do for the kingdom of God. Many things we can do just as effectively as the superstars. Let me suggest a few:

**1. We can be pastors who pray.** We may not teach as effectively as Charles Swindoll, but we have equal access to the throne of grace. I can pray for the people of my congregation as well as he can pray for his. Since I don't have as many people to keep track of as he does, I may be able to pray for mine even better! There is no more crucial ministry than to be faithful in praying for our people. After all, "Neither he who

plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Cor. 3:7).

**2. We can be pastors who model the Christian life.** We may not be as creative and innovative as Bill Hybels, but we can be as effective as he at living out our faith. We can show our people what it means to be godly. We can show our people what it means to be a loving spouse and parent. We can show our people how to treat those who wrong us. We can show our people how to serve the needy and to love the unlovely. It doesn't take superstar ability to do any of that; it simply takes an openness to God's working in our lives. If it's true that "more is caught than taught," we can have a powerful influence on our people through the way we live out our faith in their midst.

**3. We can be pastors who are servants of our people.** As pretty good pastors, we have occasional flashes of brilliance. We preach an especially good sermon. Or come up with a great ministry idea. Or effectively solve some church dilemma. But I'm finding more and more that people aren't likely to remember any of my flashes of brilliance. My parishioner is more likely to remember the time I sat with him through his wife's surgery or the time I prayed with him over the phone—or the time I just listened when he needed to talk. Hurting people aren't touched by administrative or leadership genius; they are touched and changed by love, compassion, and mercy. Even though we may not be able to lead like John Maxwell, we can all touch people by our acts of service and mercy.

**4. We can be pastors who use**





# Prayer for Graduates



by **Woodie J. Stevens**

*Colorado Springs*

our unique gifts to benefit the kingdom of God. We pretty good pastors may not have the same gifts as the superstar pastors, but according to the New Testament, all of us—no matter how modest our ministry—have received gifts that benefit the body. God doesn't want us to berate ourselves or Him because we don't have the superstar gifts. God wants us to get on with the task of using our gifts for His glory. He promises that as we do, we will administer His grace (1 Pet. 4:10).

**5. We can be people of the Word.** The priceless treasures of God's Word are not kept only for the 10-talent crowd. They are equally available to us as we are diligent in reading and study. The apostle Paul reminds us that Scripture is the tool God uses to make us "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We can be confident that God will use His Word in our lives to make us highly effective in building His kingdom.

I often find comfort in Peter and John being described as just "ordinary men" (Acts 4:13). Yet God used those ordinary men in extraordinary ways. He changed the world through them. I think God still uses ordinary people. They aren't superstars. Their names aren't household words. But in thousands of churches across the world, they faithfully touch lives for Jesus Christ.

So be encouraged, pretty good pastors! Our names probably won't be appearing on conference brochures anytime soon, but that's all right. God shows time and time again that He's in the business of using people just like us. ■

**W**e give You thanks, Heavenly Father, for the lives of these graduates whom You have called into Kingdom service.

Thank You that You have loved them and gifted each uniquely for the ministries You have prepared for them. You have given some to be apostles, prophets, and evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers for the equipping of Your saints to do works of service for the building up of Your Church. You have ordered the steps of these, Your righteous ones, and have guided their paths through these years of formal preparation.

Thank You for the magnificent way in which You have consistently supplied all their needs. You have strengthened them and helped them in the demanding days of balancing educational responsibilities and the demands of their families. You have helped them balance church and work obligations. You have proven to them Your unending love and unending mercy and Your constant faithfulness through these college years of trial and triumph.

We rejoice in You, Lord Jesus, for the accomplishments and achievements of this day. Pour out Your blessings on this baccalaureate service. Pour out Your blessings on these graduates and on all who have helped them in such significant ways to reach this achievement.

Now, Father, as they have attained this milestone, I ask that You would reveal to them how much more there

is yet to learn. Grant to them a student's heart and a teachable spirit that will cause them to be learners all the days of their lives. Keep within them a hunger and thirst for a knowledge of You as truth, and enable them to have lives of fruitful, productive ministry as they continue to deepen and expand in their knowledge of the Holy.

I ask, Heavenly Father, that You would inspire these graduates to new levels of servanthood. May their sacrificial obedience result in ministries of unusual dimensions. May they pay the high price tag of achievement with grace and joy. Never allow their learned skills and natural gifts to become barriers of pride and selfishness that will hinder their fruitfulness in Your kingdom. Grant them a pastor's heart of compassion and acceptance, a teacher's mind of creativity and depth, and a prophet's boldness of truth filled with love.

Stretch their minds and keep them on the cutting edge with new ideas and concepts. Save them from the paralysis of comfortable paths and easy choices. Cause them to be bold adventurers and risk takers in the advancing of Your kingdom's eternal work.

Now, therefore, Sovereign Lord, stretch forth Your hand and cover Your servants with the Blood of the Cross throughout all the battles to come. Grant them Your victory through the wonder of the Incarnation and the reality of the Crucifixion and the power of the Resurrection and the triumph of the Ascension, that they might be mighty men and women of valor. Cause them to pull down the strongholds of the enemy and to powerfully build up the Body of Christ, the Church, to the glory of God and of Jesus Christ, our Savior, in whose wonderful name we pray with thanksgiving. Amen. ■



# Cully's Mountain

by Bernice Karnop

Great Falls, Mont.

Carl Olson asked for a mountain when he retired. He didn't want a pine-scented retreat, but a mountain like the one Caleb requested in Joshua 14—a Promised Land that must be reclaimed from the enemy.

Cully, as he is affectionately called, spied out the land during his 41 years of ministry. He and his musically talented wife, Ruth, started as youth evangelists in 1947. He later pastored churches in Alaska, Washington, and California and served as an ecclesiastical executive from 1970 to 1984. Their ministry in each of these places helped start new churches—25 in all.

During these years of ministry, Cully and Ruth realized that God had given them the ability to encourage new recruits. Slowly a dream emerged that has now become a reality. As their Social Security income will allow, they travel to small churches and hold special meetings. Ruth, a warm and sensitive person, provides quality music, and Cully delivers a dynamic sermon.

But even more important than the time behind the pulpit, the Olsons come to encourage the pastor, his wife, and the congregation. These shell-shocked troops find an understanding ear for the struggles common to a new or small work.

A church-planting pastor must do everything from setting up the borrowed room or building to typing his own correspondence. His salary is at the bottom of the scale, and he gets no car allowance. So the harder he works, the less he gets paid. It is very difficult for the pastor and his wife not to become discouraged.

"Satan does everything he can to stop them," Cully says. "He knows if he can kill it while it's young and tender, he can destroy the testimony in that area.

"It's important for people to realize they are in a spiritual battle," he adds, "but there's nothing Satan can do to

stop them when they call on the Lord for strength."

The Olsons pass on positive remarks and give suggestions where appropriate. "Get excited about whatever you do," he admonishes. "Serve Jesus with all your might!"

Ruth admits their life isn't easy. "Before I was ready to go on such a trek with my husband, I had to pray about it because I knew it would be strenuous. You are always living out of a suitcase. Staying in other people's homes, you may find situations where you have trouble fitting in. But it has proved to be a wonderful adventure in Christian living. You meet the most wonderful Christian people."

The decision also meant selling their house and moving into a mobile home, a place they spend as few as 30 days a year. "Home" to Ruth and Cully, however, has little to do with four walls and a roof. "We know our work hastens the day when we will be home together in heaven," they say.

The Lord has given them many cherished experiences.

The bottom had dropped out of the economy in one little mining and lumber town they visited in British Columbia. Their first meeting there was attended by 23 people, and not one of the men present had a job. But some good things began to happen at the meetings. By the last night, 70 enthusiastic people were there. The pastor was thrilled. "It was wonderful to come back three years later," Cully says, "and find that church doing very well!



"We get letters from pastors saying, 'I was ready to throw in the towel. I questioned if God had ever called me, and I was looking for secular work. Since I talked with you, I realize we're important; I know we're needed.'"

Rural areas need the reminder that they are needed. Cully echoes the apostle Paul's concern for the young churches he visited. "If we can save even one pastor, we have prolonged our own ministry."

The Olsons' years as traveling evangelists, a vision they'd like to see other retired pastors catch, confirms their realistic optimism. "Satan has been more active everywhere in recent years, but I think he's overplayed his hand. Young folks see what's happening out there, and they are saying, 'This is not for me!' Instead they ask, 'What does the Lord want me to do?'"

"I feel that God is gathering a tremendous corps of sharp, outstanding believers who will give this old world one last chance."

Isaiah wrote: "The man who makes me his refuge will inherit the land and possess my holy mountain" (57:13). Caleb, who followed the Lord, drove the enemy from his mountain. The Olsons, whose strength comes from the same Source, have a good start on theirs. ■

## From the Mouths of Babes: Tips on Preaching to Young People

by Joan Martin  
Wayzata, Minn.

**O**ur newly acquired daughter-in-law had not been raised in a Christian home. She joined in Sunday worship with a vigor and interest that thrilled us. Each Sunday after and during dinner she questioned us about the sermon. She lapped up information like a sponge gobbles up water.

One morning our pastor was away, and a well-learned professor preached. At dinner we asked, "Wasn't he great? We learned so much."

The kids answered quickly, "He was OK, but we'll be glad when Pastor returns. He speaks so that we can understand."

Simplicity is not a lack of knowledge. Communication of a pastor to a young person will open the way to influence.

Each young person is different. He or she will not be like the pastor's children or others in the congregation. When placed in a box, they come bursting forth with something we've never heard about before. Yet, in many ways they have problems in common. If young persons know understanding and acceptance, they will listen and learn.

One college student said, "There are two things that will make us stop listening to a preacher. First, we can tell immediately when he is talking down to us as kids. He almost shakes his finger and uses words and phrases such as 'when you grow up.' We can grasp that he looks at us as children he must command, frighten, and talk down to. We love it when he gets down to our level and talks to us as young adults, which we are. Second, his self-righteous and judgmental attitude is saying, 'When you grow up, you can hope to be as holy or spiritual as I.' We know he's made mistakes too."

You may not be a youth pastor and "tuned in" to children and young people. You may be the *only* pastor and laden with ministry to all groups and ages. You may have grown children and



not even be particularly happy to preach to kids but feel a burden to do it anyway. How can you be more effective?

The youth groups and Sunday School classes I've enjoyed have had much to say about the pastor. There are ways to hear what they are talking about.

Go to the Sunday School classes, ask for 15 minutes, and sit down with them. Ask what they'd like to hear sermons about. Give out questionnaires with places to record their fears, hurts, worries, inquiries, and needs. They may feel better writing it than talking in front of their friends. Don't ask for signed papers.

Be observant; listen to their conversations as you pass by in the hall. Ask your children what troubles their friends. Consult the youth pastor, if you have one, about what he sees as good preaching material. Jotting down notes as you hear anecdotes and opinions and disagreements will add up to a volume of material that would otherwise be forgotten. Just listening to your own children or grandchildren when they are not aware will also add sub-



jects you've not thought about.

Youth don't need eloquent subjects. They need to be spoken to "where they stand today." Our youngest college-age son attended church one morning as usual. He did not normally discuss the sermon and usually looked quite bored throughout. That morning the pastor spoke on "lying." All the way home our son raved about the sermon. "Boy, did I get a lot from that," he said. "I wish more pastors preached on things we kids have trouble with." The minister had used anecdotes from his own life. There is nothing more interesting than to hear how his own pastor had solved a problem.

Use stories from friends and family (with permission). Tell young people how you did something as a young person to hurt someone, embarrass your family, break God's laws. Share with them your own hurt or suffering. As you admit you are not superholy, you will win them to listen and share too.

Sometimes a pastor can state his convictions but leave an open end for disagreement. He can quote scripture but add sometimes there are differing views on the passage. "I personally like this one, and I'll tell you why" will catch the interest of the youth who has thought of it differently.

*Five Cries of Youth*, by Merton P. Strommen, shares ways youth express their needs. He explains that some youth "are extremely critical of everyone and everything around them; some plunge into a flurry of service activities or secede from the world by spending every possible moment before the TV. Some turn their backs on friends and family, seeming to shut them out. Others surround themselves with a screen of cheerful insults, jokes, and high-pitched laughter. Still others are caught in a new religious ardor that seems unnatural to their parents."

Yet, they have needs that need to

be spoken about. The time of sharing leaves little by little as small children become teens. Parents, pastors, and teachers need to look for fresh ways to find out what troubles the kids in our churches. One day I remarked to my son, "You have so many things to be thankful for. I wouldn't think you had cares about anything." He replied, "Mom, you don't know half the things I worry about."

Strommen suggests several concerns of youth, including family unity, parental understanding, family pressures, life partner, lack of self-confidence, academic problems, and personal faults. Just recently our college son remarked, "Suddenly I realize I'm 22, and I must make up my mind as to my future vocation this fall. I'm not married, I'm a long way from home, and it all scares me." A sermon on how a college student determines the will of God when he's about to leave school would be great for him just now.

Recently a young person I know said, "I love it when our pastor correlates his message to my everyday living." Sometimes that pastor thinks he might insult the Christian families if he speaks on the things of the world

on within our church families. A faithful family in our church returned home from church to find their son dead in the family car in the garage. Suicide takes place in our church families too. The summer camp was

never heard a sermon on the subject. In youth groups and Sunday School classes I watch the kids who are "different." They know they are just outside the inner circle, yet don't know why. There's a sermon here for both

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**There are many kids eager and even desperate to know what being a Christian means. . . . Kids need to be told simply and often this most important issue of life.**

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shaken by the fact that many of the kids brought beer for the weekend and gave it to others. Our pastors need to deal with these issues in the pulpit and in the classrooms so that young people are aware they are not purposely pushing it aside.

Six young people were on a TV panel I observed, speaking on how to prevent pregnancy. Each gave his or her

the in and the out kid. Christian kids can be the coldest, most uninterested people in the church toward the outsider. They can turn that needy young person out into the world.

One young person recently told me, "I love it when the pastor cracks a joke and the congregation ripples with chuckles." I've heard my own kids laugh aloud at a funny story the pastor told. Then, when the serious times came, they were prepared to listen.

Another young person said, "I don't like my pastor to talk over my head, assuming I know what he's getting at." Terminology is important.

There are many kids eager and even desperate to know what being a Christian means. My husband remarked, "It was over many sermons and talks that my pastor gave when I was a teenager that in one of them I knew I wanted to accept Jesus into my heart." Kids need to be told simply and often this most important issue of life.

After the pastor has tried different methods of communicating with youth, there is one more way to receive support, information, and love from them. Once in a while you might suggest, "Hey, if you have any feedback on my sermons, let's hear it. Write me a letter. Call by phone or meet me somewhere. I'd enjoy hearing your thoughts."

This opens communication wide, and along with the feedback will tumble out hurts and needs. A pastor can speak things parents and friends cannot. He is a messenger sent by God. ■

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**Share with them your own hurt or suffering. As you admit you are not superholy, you will win them to listen and share too.**

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that have come into his church. Yet, they are there.

My son and our pastor's son were best friends. They attended a weekend conference for youth. Returning home, my son said, "Mom, we could have had any drugs we wanted. The place was full of it, and most of the rooms were full of partying kids at night." Drugs are part of the church. One dear friend found her lovely, Christian daughter was having sexual relations with a boy from the church. Fornication and adultery are carried

solution to the question of unwanted babies. Abortion and contraceptives were talked about. One young gal sat quietly listening. Finally, in the midst of the confusion she said simply, "It's so easy. All we have to do is stay away from what is wrong. Don't break God's law." All were silent. I wondered if her pastor's preaching had helped her in her stand for right.

Many of our kids are leaving church and Sunday School because they find no friendship there. Yet, in seven moves about the country I've



# TELL ME I CAN!

## A layman's plea for a victorious note from the pulpit

by Ruth Glover  
The Dalles, Oreg.



If I hadn't had my spiritual wits about me and a dash of plain old common sense, I would have left the church service that morning worse off than I entered it.

"Why God Doesn't Answer Prayer" was the sermon title in the bulletin. If the pastor's intention had been to capture our attention, he succeeded where I was concerned. I settled into the pew beside my husband and the relatives we were visiting, my interest piqued by the wry title. Or I assumed it was wry; it would be interesting, I thought, to see how the minister would turn it around for our edification.

But after the singing of the hymns, the pastoral prayer, and the usual announcements, he took his text and warmed to his subject; it was apparent he was deadly serious.

Proceeding methodically, he racked up reason after reason why God doesn't answer prayer. At point three (lack of persistence), I was alerting myself for the turnaround; at point five ("that you may consume it upon your lusts"), I was watching the clock; at point six (unbelief), entertaining doubts about the expected outcome, for the time was slipping away; and at point seven (sin in the life), I was alarmed to note he was definitely winding it up.

The hour was gone, and the speaker of the hour hadn't got around to the flip side.

Reaching rather anxiously for the bulletin, I checked the title of the evening sermon. It was something far different than "God Answers Prayer, and Why." Nor was there any indication that this morning's message was but one in a series, and good news, after all, was on the way.

With a sense of unfinished business, I stood for the final hymn. With a touch

of the old familiar feeling of rejection and dejection, I bowed my head for the closing prayer. And it was as the unhappy possessor of seven reasons why God wouldn't hear my prayers—one or two more than I'd had when I came in. I walked to the door to shake the hand of the man who had so relentlessly chopped at the roots of my hard-gotten faith and shaken so strenuously the new growth of my budding confidence in God's goodness.

Of God's sternness and implacability, I was well aware. So aware, in fact, that at one time they had well-nigh blocked out His love and mercy.



I knew enough reasons why prayer wasn't answered to forever dry up my prayer life. But I had come to believe it was the enemy of my soul who instructed me in them and who taunted me with them. To hear them mouthed, and mouthed to the exclusion of all else, from the pulpit, was something of a shock.

And yet not totally. It was all too reminiscent of a childhood in which the negative had been emphasized by lopsided Christians, to the point of being the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Backsliding had become a way of life and unbelief a shibboleth.

I had learned my lessons well; I had passed the course with flying colors; I went to the head of the class in Doubt, Despair, and Defeat. To the man of the cloth who stood before me now, I wanted to cry, "Why did you stop there? Why didn't you go on? On to 'Call upon me . . . I will deliver thee' (Ps. 50:15, KJV), to 'His

ears are open unto their cry' (Ps. 14:15, KJV), to 'Let us . . . come boldly unto the throne of grace' (Heb. 4:16, KJV)! *It's all there—in the same Book!*"

He, like me, had been versed and rehearsed in why God doesn't answer prayer, why His mercies don't endure, why His ear is deaf and His arm is shortened, why the Comforter doesn't abide forever. And he had come perilously close to hanging another alabaster of doubt around my neck.

But I clung like the proverbial impet to the great and wonderful truths I had come to believe—truths of God's faithfulness, His mercy, His longsuffering to "me-ward." These hard-won prizes would not be readily relinquished again. I had let them slip for the last time, God helping me.

But I looked around at the cheerless faces pressing toward the exit and wondered and pitied. "Tell us He does!" my heart cried. "And tell us we can!"

In another church, at another time, my daughter and her family, after moving, were searching for a new church home. The usher greeted them cordially that morning. They filed with expectant spirits into the sanctuary. In his pastoral prayer, the man of God called out the name of a sick member: "Lord," he said, "we don't ask for a miracle. Just be with her. Give her strength. Comfort her."

Not ask! What a sad summation of faith—or lack of it.

"We just can't make that our church home," Lynn said to me later with a certain amount of heat, mixed with regret. Small Shannon nodded her head in sober agreement. I recalled the time this five-year-old granddaughter had held out her little thumb—sorely eaten around the nail by a stubborn yeast infection, and very painful—and asked us to pray for it. God had answered and she knew it. I remembered the day we had all gathered around her dog, Coco, after the vet diagnosed symptoms of distemper and prayed that God would make her well. Coco is alive and healthy today, and one small, praying girl knows it.

Preacher, don't tell my children God can't! Sunday School teacher, don't tell my grandchildren God won't! Tell them He can! Tell them He will! Tell them He does!

Exhorter, don't maximize your

problems and minimize God's power. Don't glorify your doubts. Don't leave us with an aftertaste of defeat. Go on—to grace, to comfort, to strength, to victory. In a world filled with unbelief, wickedness, wretchedness, sin, and despair, tell me God has made a way for me to be an overcomer and that, in Christ, I can be more than conqueror. Tell me I can.

I'm not advocating positive thinking here, although it couldn't hurt. I'm pleading the cause for confidence in God's Word, "the victory that overcometh . . . even our faith" (1 John 5:4, KJV). Tell me it works.

One dear saint, unlettered and untutored, stood to her feet at the mid-week prayer meeting and testified, "I've had a hard week," and enumerated her troubles. Then her face lit up and she added, "But praise God! Like the Good Book says, 'It came to pass!'"

If it's anything, the gospel message is Good News. Give me the message of hope. Tell me about the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, the comforting rod and staff for the time of sorrow, the Shepherd seeking the lost sheep, the morning of joy after the night of weeping, abundant pardon for the forsaking of wickedness.

I know the "full" gospel includes the negative: God's judgment as well as His grace; His hatred of evil as well as His love for the evildoer. The results of disobedience, the effects of sin can't be ignored. Without warning signals we can't identify the borders of the narrow way. Unless we are aware of the pitfalls, we can miss the strait gate. But, in Christ, even the negative has redemption in it. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. *Later on, however*, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace" (Heb. 12:11, emphasis mine). Even the greater Lamenters recognized the principle: "Though he [God] cause grief," he expounded, "yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies" (Lam. 3:32, KJV). Tell me to look for God's redemptive purposes in everything He sends my way.

To redeem, according to the dictionary, is to "make amends for . . . to rescue and deliver from the bondage of sin and the penalties of God's violated law . . . to fulfill, as a promise." Tell me He does.

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so" (Ps. 107:2, KJV)! ■

# Letting Go

by Janice Fish  
Billings, Mont.

**I**t's hard—this matter of letting go. Although the memory still aches, I find myself filled with incredulity that the painful episode really took place. I still can't understand—I really thought I would die.

But now it's over. Why can't I let go? My mind is filled with words like "betrayed," "falsely accused," "fractured friendship."

Like waves on a beach, my memories ebb and flow.

Why can't I let go?

It's only a few steps to bitterness.

But I can't seem to let go.

"Jesus—will You help me let it go?" ■

# Where Words Fail, Your Presence Succeeds

by Mark D. Berry  
Kittanning, Pa.

**I**t was early in the morning February 25, 1991, in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Some soldiers were eating; others were resting. For most, their military duties were only part-time. They were stationed in Saudi Arabia during military efforts to liberate Kuwait. This group was a water purification unit stationed behind enemy lines, safely within well-fortified fronts, so they thought. Patriot missiles had performed effectively in targeting and destroying incoming Scud missiles.

This day would prove to be different. As the missile dropped on a makeshift barracks in Dhahran, 28 brave American soldiers lost their lives; many others were seriously injured.

One soldier was from a small town in western Pennsylvania. He left behind a wife and young child. At the age of 25, Steven Atherton was taken into eternity in a matter of seconds.

At midnight I received a telephone call from a parishioner informing me of his nephew's death—a result of the Scud attack from Iraqi forces. The family had no pastor, so he asked if I would visit this stricken family. Thoughts raced through my mind as I quickly dressed and headed for the car. What should I say? What can I do? What do you say to a mother and father who have received news that their son is a casualty of war? I have met with many families in grief but never under these circumstances. I could not possibly know their pain. However, I knew I had to minister to them in some way that night.

Driving down the winding country road to the home of Steven's parents, I thought and prayed. I reached for my Bible with the intent to read a passage of Scripture, and I considered an appropriate prayer. In a matter of moments, I realized that they did not

need a formal pastoral call or some lengthy Scripture reading. They needed a friend! They needed to see Jesus in me, not on paper.

The first words I shared with the mother came out, "I'm sorry we had to meet for the first time under these circumstances. I want you to know that I care, and I will be praying for you as you face the days ahead."

Her first words to me were words of anguish, "Why did my son have to die? It's all because of politics and oil!"

This was not the time for a long discussion over the war in the Middle East. She did not want me to respond with a political answer. She was crying out for help. Having an abundance of frustration and anger mounting within, she was only grieving for her son. I should allow her to vent her emotions.

Wondering how I could answer her question, "Why my son?" I had to admit, "I don't have an answer, but I do



know God loves you. He will help you through this if you let Him." I continued, "God did not want your son or anyone else to die. Because of man's sin, death has entered the world." It seemed like nothing helped her. Soon I found that my love and concern was what made the difference. Nothing I could say or do counted as much as my presence.

In counseling experiences, I have discovered effective ways to console and assist the grieving. Bookstores carry an abundance of material that offers counseling advice. Counseling helps are essential, but during initial moments of tragedy a consoler's presence is foremost. Expressing Jesus' love is much more therapeutic than textbook advice or eloquent words during crisis. Opportunity will come for openness and counseling as the grieving person reaches for acceptance of his loss. We must consider God's timing in these circumstances.

As the Scud missile landed on his barracks that February day, Steven passed into eternity. I thank God for the opportunity to minister to his family when they learned of his unexpected death. As time passes, the bereaved family may reflect upon the persons who touched their lives, caring, loving, listening, and supporting during their time of hopelessness and distress. *No special training is required to be a friend!*



# What I Learned About Caring from Funeral Directors

by Randy Sly  
*Olathe, Kans.*



Everett just died in a plane crash!" My secretary stood in the doorway, tears streaming down her face, while I sat motionless—frozen in disbelief. An elder—a friend—a leader of our church had perished a few hours before in a light plane crash near the Black Hills of South Dakota. So much for anticipating a routine day.

I have always been frustrated with my handling of pastoral care to the bereaved. When notified of a death in the church family, the same questions begin to gnaw at me. What should I do first? Do I drop everything now or wait for more information? How much time should I spend with the family? How do I make room for a funeral with all the other deadlines facing me right now?

A few years ago I decided to investigate this whole area of grief care by talking to some individuals who spend a lot of time with grieving families: funeral directors. Having observed various levels of quality in the care given families, they eagerly offered me some helpful hints and amusing anecdotes. I listened and learned. From those conversations, I have established certain convictions concerning the handling of a death in the church and developed the following list of resolutions.

**1. I will initiate immediate contact with those most directly involved.**

As the presiding elder of the church, I need to initiate immediate contact with the person or family who experienced the loss. If I can't do immediately to the house, a phone call is a must. I want the family to know I'm thinking about them and

praying for them. When I was in chaplaincy training during seminary, our supervisor talked to us about having a "ministry of presence" as representatives of Christ. During a time of grief, this ministry of presence is very important.

While pastoral care should not be limited to the senior pastor, I have to remember that I am seen as the set representative of the body. I should make every effort to contact the family and let them know of my care and concern. Then I can hand off the more in-depth care to other elders, staff members, house church leaders, etc. The family will receive more complete ministry, yet they are assured that the senior pastor or presiding elder (and through him, the church) is committed to being a part of their lives during this critical time.

**2. I will make grief care a high-priority item for the church.**

A death event used to be viewed as an intrusion into the life and routine of my ministry and that of the church. I never admitted to that feeling; nevertheless it was there. From my discussions with funeral directors, I was convicted about the critical importance of grief care and the need



for this ministry to take priority in my busy schedule. I may have a sermon to prepare, several appointments pending, and maybe a daylong fishing trip planned. Yet the grieving family needs support at this particular time perhaps more than any other time in their lives. In James we read that the pure practice of our faith involves the care of widows and orphans. If their need is a high priority in the heart of God, it should be in the church.

Death brings out many questions and concerns about priorities, life issues, and after-life issues. In one situation in which I was involved, a child in the family had never been confronted with death before. It became a critical time to minister the foundational truths of salvation and life. As Christ's servant, I needed to be there for the family.

**3. I won't assume anything.**

Most families are walking new territory when dealing with grief. They are under incredible stress and may not be taking adequate time to think things through. As they talk through issues, I have to remember they are under stress, and to be patient with them. In some situations, family members have said some very insensitive things concerning the church and my ministry. At those times I pray and commit the family and their decisions



to the Lord. I ask the Lord to help me take nothing personally and not hold anything against them.

If the family talks about arrangements in my presence, I go through a checklist with them. First, we establish whether they want me to officiate at the funeral. Sometimes they may prefer that an old friend of the family or a previous pastor preside. As a care giver in their lives, my responsibility is to be sure they are walking through this time with support in whatever fashion they desire. I want to assure them such decisions won't be taken personally.

Second, we discuss other details such as time and date in order to coordinate with the church's calendar; other persons such as musicians and vocalists to be involved in the funeral; and if they need help contacting relatives, friends, and business associates.

Third, I gently probe the family to deal with peripheral issues that may be uncomfortable. Decisions need to be made in regard to the funeral home choice, cemetery arrangements, military and veteran's options, and memorial contributions.



## Pastoral care should not be limited to the senior pastor.



### **4. I will try to be with the family when funeral arrangements are made.**

For many years I thought it was an intrusion to go to the funeral home with the family, that this was "their time" to take care of details. However, funeral directors assure me that most families are very uncomfortable with the task of making arrangements, and they don't invite the minister because they don't want to impose on his busy schedule. With this

new perspective, I now volunteer to come. My presence is a familiar reassurance to the family and allows the funeral director to work directly with me concerning many details. By attending this meeting, most of the surprises are also eliminated.

### **5. I will be sensitive in spending time with the family.**

I used to get somewhat embarrassed when someone from another church would talk about how "Pastor Jones spent all day and all night with the family." I now remind myself that that much attention may not be good for them. The family needs adequate time to be a family. A certain amount of sharing and planning must take place with only the immediate family present. Also, when I or others are present, the family may have an unspoken sense of responsibility to be our hosts or be on their best behavior. Several funeral directors encouraged me to give the family plenty of decompression time together. Sometimes I have even quietly encouraged well-meaning members of the church to leave as I do.

### **6. I will encourage family members to be family members.**

Relatives who are involved in ministry often try to pastor the family. It usually doesn't work. Several problems develop, including the person's own inability to deal with grief. I try to acknowledge the call and gifting of the person as a peer and even make room for them to help with the funeral if they so desire. However, I strongly encourage them to participate primarily as a family member. Often this is the best ministry they could have at the time.

I remember one minister-relative telling me what great comfort he had in knowing that his immediate family was getting good pastoral care from the leaders of the church. That must remain our common concern, that the family receive the long-term support needed. A visiting relative, no matter how skilled, cannot provide that kind of pastoral care.

### **7. I will bathe my visits with Scripture and prayer.**

It's amazing how many people can be so insensitive when they visit with a grieving family, especially when they feel awkward. Each family that walks through tragedy has to find the

grace to be kind and understanding to those who express their sympathy, even when they express it wrongly. We've all heard such comments as: "He looks so natural lying there." "I had a brother who had the same problem. He took some wonder drug and is healthy as a horse." "Shame on you for being so sad. We all know where he is!"



## Most families are walking new territory when dealing with grief.



My goal is to be a welcome change for the family, bringing encouragement, love, and a Godward focus. I try to fill my visits with spiritual food to the family, not just idle chitchat. While reminiscing and casual conversation can help minimize pain, the Word of God, especially passages of hope, and prayer can be a resource for strength and help to the family.

I keep a specially marked copy of the New Testament with Psalms and Proverbs handy for such events. My mind doesn't always track clearly during these times of stress, so certain scriptures are premarked that undergird the sense of hope and perspective that we can take with us as believers.

### **8. I will take the lead at the funeral service.**

There is a certain discomfort in any funeral service, especially if the minister and funeral director do not understand their respective roles. Funeral directors have unanimously assured me they do not want to play a front line role with the family, especially during the service. They desire that I assume leadership and give direction to the service and care of the family.

They want to assist in any way possible in a supportive role. After hearing this, I became more directive and found we worked much better as a team. Whatever leadership I gave was welcomed and needed. This insight has dramatically changed my relationship to the funeral director. I now see him as a servant to the family and a support to the ministry that the Lord wants me to bring into the family's life.



**Families  
are very  
uncomfortable  
with the task  
of making  
arrangements.**



**I will spend time with the family at the cemetery.**

One of the funeral directors made a special point to emphasize ministry at the graveside. After the committal, most families like to hang back for a little while, chatting with friends as they leave, and then privately say their last good-byes. Sometimes the pastor rushes off from the cemetery in order to fulfill another commitment. I have been guilty of this myself. He leaves the family to figure out how to finish saying good-bye and go back to "normal" life.

Several years ago a wise pastor told me to leave my time open after the funeral, always ride in a vehicle provided by the funeral home, and spend time with the family afterward. This really connected with the counsel of the funeral directors. The family needs some continuity following the graveside service. I am a part of that process, not a spectator or merely a resident at a ceremony. By walking

through the postservice hours with the family, I am able to slowly release my care and support. Some of my most wonderful opportunities for pastoral care have been experienced during these after-service times.

**10. I will take the initiative to implement a funeral dinner.**

The time frame during which the funeral takes place can take on all the dynamics of a family reunion. A large number of family members may be together for the first time in many years. The church should assist the family in making this a time of reunion by assuming responsibility for a funeral dinner. This allows the family time to be together without any distractions. We've seen healing of relationships taking place at these meals. I encourage the family to allow us, if someone hasn't already volunteered, to host this dinner for them and relieve them of all the details.

**11. I will follow up the family systematically.**

While my schedule may go back to normal the day after a funeral, this does not happen in the home of the bereaved. They are sorting through clothes, personal possessions, and photographs. They are also meeting with insurance companies, writing "thank-you" notes, and trying to reassemble a life of their own. I intentionally plan a systematic follow-up to take place with someone visiting regularly two days, two weeks, two months, and then six months after the funeral. This is not just a casual call, but a visit specifically aimed at asking the critical questions: "How are you doing? How is the adjustment going? What can we do to help?"

**12. I will seek to establish a reentry pattern for the family into the life of the church.**

A woman, recently widowed, told me, "I feel like a fifth wheel with our old friends. My last time going out to eat with them was a terrifying reminder that my life is now permanently changed. I realized our friendships will not be the same."

Many families can walk through the first days of a death with great grace. They usually have plenty of support from friends, relatives, and church people. But when all the activity di-

minishes, relatives begin to leave for their own homes, and the extra food from the funeral dinner is gone, a new form of loneliness begins to creep in. This is the time when the family again begins to remake their lives.

The church must also be ready to assimilate these people back into fellowship with a major difference in the relationship. Ministry involvements, friendships, and other issues can change drastically for those who are repatterning their life. During this critical period, the church must help family members experience new forms of relationships and experiment with new opportunities for ministry. No one can pretend that "nothing has changed," but with patience and honesty from the church, these individuals can find new entrances into body life.



**Funeral  
directors do not  
want to play a  
front-line role.**



Death comes from a variety of causes. Families are, of course, all quite unique. I'll never forget having to tell a family that their 20-year-old son had been brutally murdered or watching the countenance of a mother and father sink as their lifeless daughter was carried out of a river. How different are those from the glorious homegoings of saints who quietly went to be with their Lord. Yet, with all this variation, I have discovered that the counsel of the funeral directors has been accurate. My resolutions remain workable. While there is still a long way to go, my confidence in grief care has grown measurably upward. The phone just rang! Another death in the church! Let's see, resolution number one . . . ■

## The "Other Times"

by Brent Wyss

Yakima, Wash.

**Editorial Note:** Part of the church board's responsibility is to hear progress reports of the church staff. This monthly report to the West Valley Church of the Nazarene, Yakima, Wash., gives evidence of a deep and profound progress in a more invisible arena.

Brent Wyss's youthful wife is fighting bone cancer. The Wyss family has kept their faith and have learned to draw strength from the Lord.

Here is a window into their uncertain pilgrimage.

### Board Report

May 21, 1992

Every time I sit down to write anything these days, the first thing that comes to mind is to say, "Thank you," for the way you have held Anne and me in your prayers.

Most of the time I am working to be all I can for the church and my wife, and I don't realize what pressures I am under. Then there are the "other times." During the "other times," I am faced with the reality that working to do something doesn't make the most important issues go away. During these "other times," the Lord reminds me that working to be all I can for my wife and church must always come second to my capacity to hear His voice and respond appropriately to Him.

I have felt like a man living in two worlds—feeling like, when I'm with Anne, that I should be working in my other ministries in our church. Of course, the reverse is also true. Your prayers have helped get me through the "other times" when you could not know the struggles. Here are some of the things I am learning in the "other times."

It is easy to feel that if the service, or the production, or whatever is doing well, then I am doing well. If "it" has touched God, then I have

touched God. Often this is true, but sometimes it is not. Just being in a worship service in which I sense God's power at work around me doesn't necessarily mean He's changing me. That's a good lesson for anyone who is in a worship service.

Not until I personally respond by action and obedience and acknowledgment that what He is saying is meant for me can I touch the heart of God. Not until I change, grow, and develop in my ability to see and act as He sees and acts can I really know God's power personally. Only then do I make decisions well and order my time so that my public life reflects a private life infused with the insight by God through His Holy Spirit and the Word. Only then is there peace in the "other times."

I would like to assess how I am doing based on other things. How well is Anne feeling? How did the service go? How many sang in the choir? But these things are not necessarily representative of how things really are with me. It would be nice to think that because a ministry under my direction went well, I was doing well. But there are at least two problems.

1. It is God who makes the worship possible, and He does with it what He likes. I have always known it, taught it, and believed it. But still I judge myself by the result, a sort of barometer of "how I

am" based on what was accomplished while I was present.

2. The other problem is that God designed ministry to occur through people. If I am getting my approval based on how others are doing ministry—well, let's just say that I'm tired of feeling like a failure because so few came to the rehearsal, service, party, planning session, committee meeting, revival service, etc. Just as dangerous is the feeling that because many came and "I went all right, then I must be doing all right. This is the wrong barometer: "If they are doing well, then I must be doing well."

During the "other times," God reminds me that I'm doing well only if I am doing what He commands and expects of me. That may or may not have anything to do with people and programs.

Thank the Lord for "other times" when He reminds us that He still is ultimately in control. Our efforts only count when and how He sees fit.

*Thank You, God, for "other times" that remind me that I'm responsible, first and foremost for the condition of my heart, my relationship with You, and that "all these things shall be added" in Your own season. Lord, help me make use of these "other times."*

Pastor Brent

# I Did What I Could

by Dorothy J. Downey

Weedville, Pa.

**M**y heart goes out to the very elderly who need constant care, as well as to the caregivers. One never knows the burdens and heartaches involved until he has been there. I experienced this very close to home a few years ago when my mother-in-law moved to our town to be close to us in her latter years.

She and I had always been close—more like mother and daughter than in-laws. I called her “Mom,” and I was “Honey” to her most of the time. For many years we had wonderful family dinners, trips, and cooking sprees. She could make the best homemade puddles! After Dad died, Mom stayed in Ohio at the homeplace for 7 years until it was too much for her. At age 85, she chose to leave and move to Michigan.

As time went on, we began to see changes in her mental stability. She became very forgetful and confused at times, with her health rapidly failing due to severe diabetes, heart problems, and hardening of the arteries. Yet, she would not admit that she couldn't keep things straight anymore. She cherished her independence. She covered up her lack of clarity of mind by blaming another person for her mistakes. She knew that if her three sons understood her incompetence, she would no longer be independent. But they knew!

When we tried to help her pay bills, do her laundry, help clean her house, shampoo her hair—all the things I'd done before—she'd become very angry and accusatory toward us. She refused to let us help and then told others we wouldn't help her!

I felt so helpless and hurt to see my “second mother” act this way. She had always loved me. Now to have her accuse me of all sorts of things re-

ally caused grief. My husband and I talked at length to her doctor. He explained her condition. This helped us. However, since she looked so healthy, outsiders never knew her real condition. Anything she told them about us seemed true to them!

After one of her confused times, she told me to never call her again. But I could not do that! I couldn't let a day go by without checking on her to see if she was all right. When I did drop in, she was very cool. When I called, she was curt and unfriendly. If someone offended her, she would get confused and eventually say that I was the one who did this to her. Her doctor suggested a foster care or nursing home, but she would have nothing to do with it. Her sons decided to let her stay alone as long as she could, although they were very apprehensive.

I prayed earnestly for a solution and for grace to bear this heavy load. I still loved her dearly, but the mom I knew in years gone by was not the same person in this body. This was so hard to accept!

One day a wonderful ministerial friend of ours was in our home. Since we were close friends and he was much older and experienced in dealing with situations like this, I told him about our problem and asked for guidance.



He said something that changed my whole outlook. He told me the Bible story of the criticism the woman received from Jesus' disciples when she poured costly oil on His feet instead of giving the money to the poor. My friend emphasized Jesus' answer: “Leave her alone. . . . She did what she could” (Mark 14: 6, 8; see John 12:7).

The minister helped me see that God understood my situation and that I was doing all I could with Mom. I was not responsible for what she would not let me do. If I were neglecting her by choice, then God would be displeased. That was not the case. She wouldn't let me do for her! What contentment this insight brought to me. From that day forward, I did what I could for her and did not feel guilty over things she wouldn't let me do. It was a major step and a turning point in my relationship to her. Our situation didn't change, but my attitude toward it did. I did not let her caustic and accusatory remarks bother me.

Mom passed away in December 1988. She was buried on my birthday. That was special for me! I'm sure she is with the Lord. She accepted Him as her Savior many years ago. She could not help the tricks her mind played on her in her latter years. I look forward to the day when we meet again in heaven. Her mind will be clear again, her eyes bright, and her happy laugh like it used to be. We will both forget this unhappy experience. We'll pick up where we were before her mind gave in to old age. More and more I am forgetting those hard times and remembering the wonderful times we had together. They were many! I really miss her! I still love her! She's still my “mom.” ■

# On Hold

by Dennis A. Brenner

Lansing, Mich.

I fretted rather impatiently on the telephone. The background music of the local radio station seemed hardly to pale my frustration of being placed on hold. I am amazed at the assumption by some local businesses that I would enjoy listening to their selection of music while on hold.

How do you feel when put on those time-consuming, nerve-racking, mindless hold situations? I like to have both oars in the water and paddling at the same time! To say the least, I can hardly cope with the melodious statement, "Will you hold, please," or "Thank you for holding; the next available person will help you."

However, being on hold on the phone, while annoying, is not the significant problem for a number of pastors. Recently, I visited with a pastor who, at the time, was without an assignment. He had not committed adultery, embezzled funds, or lost his integrity. He had supported the local and general programs of the church. He went on to say that he had worked hard preparing sermons and visiting the sick and shut-ins. He felt he had done his best and then was removed from his pastorate. It had left him with feelings of guilt, inadequacy, loneliness, and rejection. He was on hold!

For me, it all began in a blur: sermons to prepare, calls to make on the



latest visitors, counsel for those in need, and quick trips to the hospital to check on the sick. Then, there were district or conference responsibilities to tend to along with community involvement. There was the ever-present need of raising monies, managing finances, directing staff, and refereeing the latest board meeting, not to mention the latest fracas between a member or two who may have had a falling out. To be sure, life is a bit hectic for the pastor as he engages his heart and mind while plunging into the depths of ministry—it was for me.

Before long, I had planned, promoted, and prevailed in setting up a work schedule that was nigh humanly impossible to keep up. But, I knew I could do it—that is, if I ate well, slept well, kept my desires short and my commitments strong, and, oh yes, worked hard. Yes, I could do it! As a pastor, I built a network of commitments and obligations that sapped every ounce of strength, time, and attention in my workday. I did it! Inter-

estingly, as long as the "lines" were open, communications were going on, and the work-load phone was ringing, everything seemed just fine—as long as I wasn't on hold!

Like my friend, breathless and weary, but content to be "doing the work of the ministry," I just marched on. There seemed to be no end to the ability to contend and respond to all the demands of my ministry. The building program was coming to a completion. It had stretched out over a two-year period, but everything was debt-free! The church would be able to dedicate this much-needed expansion for almost one-half the projected contractual price. Volunteers had come forward. The work had progressed. It would be a time of celebration!

New people were coming into the church services. New converts hungry for the Word of God were getting involved in Bible study. Attendance statistics were making upward progress with new members joining regularly. What more could anyone ask for? A raise in pay was not even on my mind.

In fact, the only thing that seemed to really bother me was the occasional moments when I would pick up the phone, dial a number, and get put on HOLD! For me, picking up the phone and being put on hold was like



a prison sentence. It was the ultimate frustration—to sit and listen to that intolerable, mindless music playing in the background!

And then it happened, similar to what my pastor friend shared—the unbelievable, unspeakable, unthinkable reality—my ministry was put on hold. At least I thought so. A few of the saints wanted a change—not the majority, to be sure, but a “significant minority.” There I sat, replaying in my own mind the words of that tender pastor’s heart. He had been broken in spirit and was weeping in soul. I, too, felt as though I had done something wrong. It was as though somehow I really needed God’s forgiveness. Like the lepers of old who went about crying, “Unclean, unclean.” I identified! Questions flooded my mind when I was put on hold in my ministry. “What did I do wrong?” “What could I have done differently?” “Whose fault was it?” While self-analysis can be very helpful, in the initial moments for me it seemed sterile and without benefit.

At least, when on hold with the phone, there had been that music—detestable, mindless music—that occasional break, “Our next available representative will be right with you!” But now—now there was nothing. Not the sound of music, not the repetitious voice, “Please hold; someone will be right with you.” There was no sound, only silence.

What does one do when he or she is put on hold in the real life of pastoral ministry? My first thought was to “hang up.” But no, that would never do. Second, “Who was I going to hang up on?”

I began learning that I needed to “hang on,” and that never has been easy. I could almost detest those words had I not used them so frequently myself in counseling others: “Hang on.” It echoes in my mind: “Hang on.” It vibrates through the quiet chambers of my soul: “Hang on.” And for how long?

I had experienced in the past that if one is patient long enough, sooner or later a response will come on the line—if one holds on. Yet, being on hold is difficult. It is especially difficult for ministers like myself for several reasons. First of all, the feeling of wasting time can easily overtake a person’s well-being. I questioned, “How can I do ministry when I am on hold?” God knows I need to be preaching, teaching, calling, planning, going, doing. And here I am on hold, wasting time of all things. Dr. Earl Lee’s philosophy came to mind, “There are two kinds of pastors: workaholics and failures.” I identified with that philosophy. The question was, “Which one am I?”

A second thought overtook me: “Why am I on hold anyway? Doesn’t God have a hot line? Is God so inept that He cannot communicate with the 5 billion people on the face of the earth?” My theology has always stated that God is on the line. Just pick up the phone. And here I am—on hold. Why me, Lord? Is not mission and performance tied together? Are not faith and works congruent? What is the bottom line here, God? Why am I on hold? Can’t You just give me another assignment and I’ll get on with the task?

It is at this very point that ministry

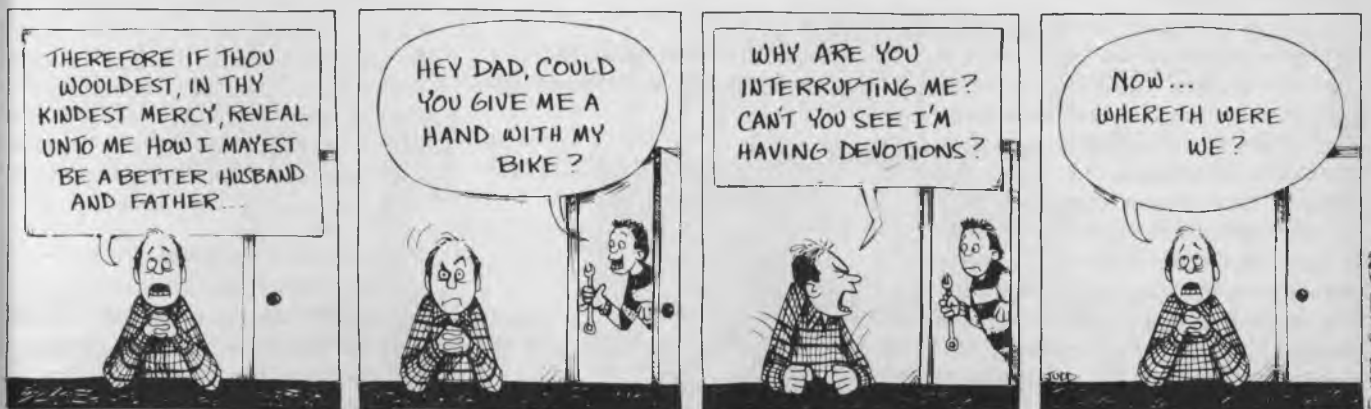
has begun to take on a fresh new meaning. It is not what “I” can or cannot do. It is simply “we,” God and me. God is using me at this very moment in this very circumstance to show forth His glory.

As I listen, I am becoming more and more aware of a host of ministers like myself—on hold. Could it be that the Psalmist had experienced being on hold when he wrote, “Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:5b)?

While on hold, I am finding new depths to my faith and my understanding of God as well as a renewed awareness of people with hurts all about me. These new depths have come as I have sought His Word more pointedly. Suddenly I am finding opportunity to “minister”—not in ways I had intended, but nonetheless being used by God.

I have said to my friends on the phone, “Go ahead, it’s your nickel.” I don’t mean to be flippant with God, but it is His nickel, isn’t it? In fact, all the nickels, dimes, dollars, minutes, and hours are really all His, aren’t they? I punched in on His clock when He became Lord, right? In my discovery, my reluctant discovery ON HOLD, I am beginning to understand that God is at work whether I hear the music, the monotonous voice, or just silence. The important lesson I am discovering is that ministry is process. Ministry is not an end to be achieved. Therefore, be it “ON HOLD” or full steam ahead, one can be confident that ministry is taking place if one’s life is fully committed to the Lord. With this understanding, joy has come. ■

## BEYOND BELIEF



## Giving Attendance to Reading

by Robert Morris Isbell

Willow Grove, Pa.

**T**ill I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:13, KJV).

You who minister the Word of God, how much attention do you give to "reading" publicly? Of the three practices to which the apostle Paul gave equal emphasis in 1 Tim. 4:13, there appears in many of our pulpits to be far less attention given "to reading" than "to exhortation, to doctrine." Hearing the way in which the Bible is read publicly in Christian assemblies, you would think that public reading of the Scriptures is secondary to the other two duties. Sometimes it is read too swiftly; other times, too slowly. Each way it is often read with little inflection in the tone of voice to give emphasis where it is due and to be helpful in giving the sense thereof. Thankfully we are past the times that tried men's souls when the reading of sermons droned on and on for an hour or two in required monotone. Why should we weary our hearers with the unexcited reading of the Scriptures?

### PUBLIC READING

It seems preachers can read from various publications the quotations of men with greater zeal when they seek support for what they are preaching. Paul's charge to Timothy is ignited by the word "attendance." It lights the flame of "devotion of thought and effort" that is to burn in the public reading of God's Word. The word means "take heed; give heed." It suggests, "devotion of thought and effort to a thing." The word for "reading" denotes public reading. "The context of 1 Tim. 4:13 makes clear that the refer-



ence is to the care required in reading the Scriptures to a company, a duty ever requiring the exhortation, 'take heed.'"<sup>1</sup> The word is used in the Septuagint translation of Neh. 8:8: "And when they read in the Book of the Law of God, Esdras taught and enforced it with a knowledge of the Lord, so that the people gained understanding by the reading."<sup>2</sup>

### PREPARATION FOR READING

It is reported that at a certain gath-



ering of celebrities, a famous actor recited the 23rd psalm. When his expertly rendered recitation was completed, he received thunderous applause. Then, someone asked a venerable, retired minister to render the same. When he completed his recitation, there was a dead silence of awe. The actor stepped forward and declared, "I know the 23rd psalm; the reverend knows the Shepherd."

The Bible says that "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10, KJV). Did you notice the order? No wonder when Ezra stood up to read the Scriptures that "the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law" (Neh. 8:3, KJV). And they "stood up" (v. 5) and listened to the reading "from the morning until midday" (v. 3, KJV)! What a service that must have been! It was the charge that ignited a great spiritual revival in Israel. "How tedious and tasteless" it can be when an enflamed devotion to the Word of God is lacking in the public reading of the Scriptures. What a difference is made when the reader has prepared his heart in seeking the law of the Lord and is practicing it. He is "a ready scribe" (Ezra 7:6, KJV), qualified to teach it, and, when he openly reads it, his "profiting" from it will "appear to all" who hear him (1 Timothy 4:15, KJV).

### PREACHING THE READING

Through the past 50 years, I have had the privilege and profit of sitting under gifted Bible teachers, evangelists, pastors, and missionaries who immediately drew my attention upon

their reading of the Word of God. They kept me spellbound throughout their messages and studies. No doubt, some of their enthusiasm has guided me in my efforts to read the Scriptures to the companies of people whom I have addressed. I made the effort to read the Word of God as though I had written it. I made the Bible mine!

A preacher who reads the Scriptures well may have one consolation. His hearers may have "gained understanding by the reading," if not from his message.

A Christian woman, my spiritual mother, whose prayers certainly helped bring me to Christ in my late teens, in her youth was converted in Germany in an open field. There, some people gathered to hear an uneducated farmer, a layman, read from the Word of God. She ran from the congregation under heavy conviction, cried all the way home, and, with great joy, declared to her mother that she received Jesus as her Savior.

#### PERSONAL ASSIMILATION OF THE READING

Ministers of God's Word, pay more attention to the way you read the Word of God in public. We are quickly impressed with a person's conviction of, or interest in, anything that he may champion in the way that he talks about it. We soon realize two people are in love by the way they talk about each other. We "read" them by the "reading" they project to us, in the "devotion of thought and effort" that they diffuse. Upon entering His ministry on earth, one of the first public acts that our Lord per-

formed was to enter the synagogue at Nazareth, His hometown, where He "stood up for to read" (Luke 4:16, KJV) from the prophecy of Isaiah. He finished reading, "closed the book, and . . . gave it again to the minister, and sat down." The impact? "And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him" (v. 20, KJV). After a brief commentary, indicating that this scripture He had read was fulfilled in their hearing, we read further that "all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth" (v. 22, KJV).

What a heartwarming experience it must have been for the two disciples on their way to Emmaus to whom the risen Lord Jesus "expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself . . . beginning at Moses and all the prophets" (Luke 24:27, KJV). What a Bible class that must have been! Can we imagine the Lord quoting the Scriptures as though reading them in a monotonous, apathetic, phlegmatic manner, without the justifiable enthusiasm they rightly deserve? We can say with certainty that our Lord Jesus had assimilated the words of His Father, making them His very own, as the Son of Man, subordinate to God the Father, in identifying himself with our humanity. The Word was a part of Him. "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart" (Ps. 40:8, KJV; a messianic psalm). He left the prime example for us to follow in our subordination to the Father and in assimilating His words in our hearts. Then, "[His] words abide [make their home] in [us]" (John 15:7, KJV). We

must "take heed" in giving special "attendance to reading" publicly with "devotion of thought and effort." When we do, we bear witness to those who hear us read the Word of God concerning our love for the God of the Word.

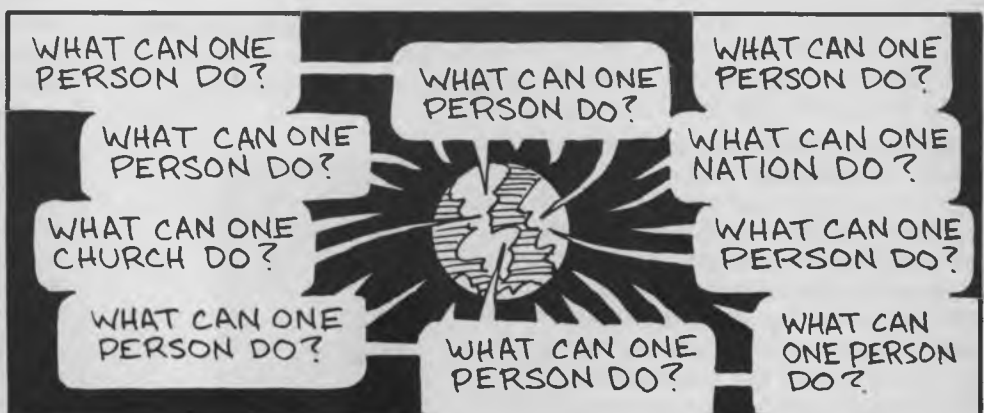
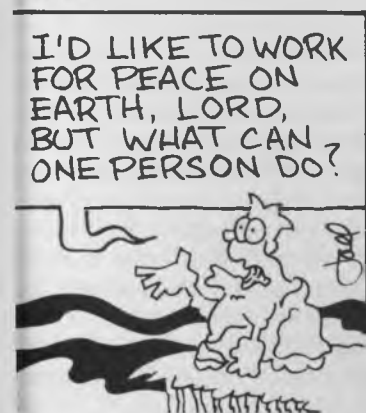
#### CONCLUSION

A symphonic orchestra conductor can take the musical score of a famous composer and "read" it to an audience by "breathing Beethoven" into the musicians and their instruments, throwing himself into the performance of a symphony as though he had composed it. An actress can submerge herself into the role of a character, moving an audience to acclaim her performance as superbly representing the character she had assumed. The reader of a literary composition can hold an audience enraptured in the flow of words that are transposed from the inanimate pen of the writer to the living voice of the reader. Yet, when a man of God stands before a congregation with an open Bible, which is the Word of God, "God-breathed," he can read like a faucet with a faulty washer, the words dripping aimlessly out of his mouth to fall on distracted ears. None of us will ever reach the zenith of perfection in the reading of the Scriptures that the Word of God truly deserves. But we can strive, under the Spirit's anointing, to read them with that "care" and "duty ever requiring the exhortation, 'take heed.'" ■

1. W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966).

2. *Ibid.*

## Pontius' Puddle



Joel Kaufmann

# Writing for Local Newspapers

by Bob Johnson

Kalama, Wash.

All of us look for new ways to advertise our church and our ministry, and at the lowest cost possible. Try writing for your local newspaper. It's not costly but is very rewarding for both you and your church.

Most cities, small or large, have all kinds of newspapers. The circulation is not what's important. What is important is that they will give you column space of 250 words or more.

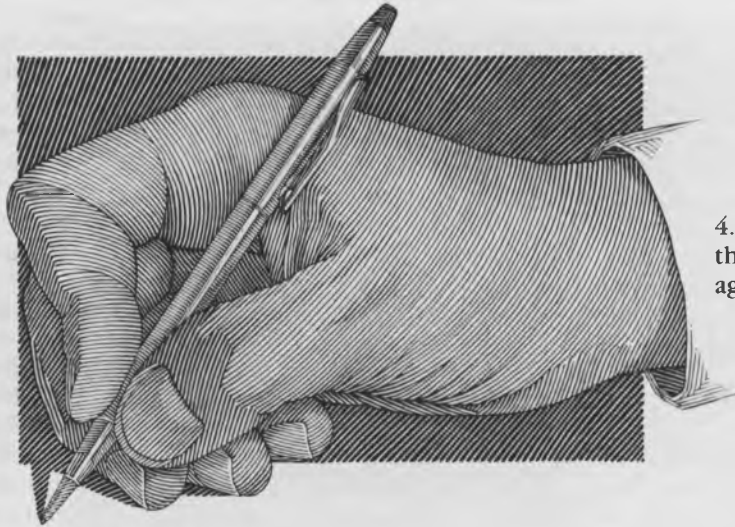
Most newspapers have a religion page. If they don't, filler space may be available. Those newspapers with a religion page usually allow pastors to write for them.

You don't have to worry about your competition. Surprisingly, most pastors don't take the time to write. I'm not sure why. For pastors who will write, their possibilities are endless.

Some things you need to remember when writing for your local newspaper:

1. Have the paper take a good picture of you or provide them with one. Have them put it at the top of your column along with the name of your church spelled correctly.

2. Remember that your readers are usually conservative. Do not write on liberal topics; it could cost you your reputation. I have no validation for the following comment: "I've been accepted by liberals for my conservative articles. But I've never been complimented by the conservatives for any liberal views I've expressed in any articles."



3. There is unlimited subject matter for your column.

- a. There are national concerns, such as the homeless, drug abuse, child abuse, alcoholism and its effect on the family.
- b. Family issues and the teaching of values. The involvement of the father in child rearing.
- c. There is the care of the elderly.
- d. You can discuss ethical and moral dilemmas that face us daily.
- e. You can deal with religious trends of our day.
- f. You have personal experiences that have caused you to change and the effect on your family.



g. Situations have occurred in your community that have affected your congregation and community.

4. Let's consider some things you need to guard against:

a. Don't preach to your readers. Save that for Sunday mornings.

b. Be sure to stay within the established maximum column length. It will keep your editor happy.

c. Never waste your column space by engaging in a back-and-forth debate with anyone. You'll come out the loser.

d. Do not attempt to promote your denomination, church, or its doctrine.

e. Be certain that your article is in by the deadline. This will give your editor time to organize the page on which your article appears. It will assist them in meeting their deadline too.

One of our greeters approached me with a middle-aged couple. She introduced them and said, "These folks are building a home in the area and will be moving into it soon. They've been following your writings over the last year and wanted to hear you preach to see if you lived up to your reputation." Even before they move, we have an "in" with them that no other church in our community has. What a great opportunity!

Writing for your local newspaper will afford many blessings and privileges. ■

# The Parsonage Is Three Doors Down

by Carol L. Bruning

**B**etter Homes and Gardens can't beat my fantasy dream house. Occasionally, I'll find myself mentally designing this incredible mansion in the country, with a paid mortgage and no utility bills.

Few of us have accommodations to match our fantasies. It doesn't matter what reality provides as our abode. It may be as humble as a missionary's thatched hut or as opulent as the Trump Towers. The Lord still calls us to make it hospitable for our family and guests (Lev. 19:33-34 and 1 Tim. 3:2).

Often, life presents us circumstances that make accomplishing this task a real challenge. As a military chaplain's wife, my current residence is in government housing, traditionally termed "quarters." In our neighborhood housing area, there are hundreds of duplex homes, exactly alike. It's common for visitors to get lost and drive endlessly through the community, looking for the correct house number.

Our home has not always been so uniformly sterile. Before coming on active duty, my husband and I served seven years in the located ministry. The parsonage there was a far cry from the anonymity of army quarters.

The church we last served was in a small, close-knit, traditional Southern town. The church sat on Main Street, across the town square from the courthouse. It stands as a stately, beautiful example of ante-bellum architecture.

Our parsonage, three doors down from the church, blended in as an attractive red brick home with white shutters. A stone wall surrounded the front yard. Centuries-old oak trees provided cool shade for the entire house. The home created a cozy picture, charming and comfortable.

Soon after we moved in, we discovered our parsonage home was not

just conveniently located for the minister and family. It was also strategically located for the rest of the congregation and the community.

Folks awaiting hearings at the courthouse found a cool resting-place under the shade of those oak trees, along the stone wall. They ate moon pies and drank cold RCs and threw the bottles up by our front steps. I collected quite a bit in return deposits. They chewed tobacco and had contests to see who could spit the farthest into the street.

At first, all this was quite a shock for my Yankee sensibilities. Members of our congregation, however, helped us accept it as part of an age-old tradition.

Located so near the church, we often played hosts to an unusual array of surprise visitors. Two elderly, retired deacons became our morning alarm clocks. Ostensibly, they came to check for any repairs we might need. Mostly, they came to share our morning coffee. We reveled as they told us the town's news and the history of our more illustrious members.

Several widow ladies discovered my husband's sweet tooth. They arrived late in the afternoon to educate us on the delights of Southern pies. They earned instant recognition the next Sunday as the creators of such delicacies as chess pie and black-bottom pie.



We were thrilled when the young adult group asked if they could suspend Thursday Bible study at the church. They preferred, instead, to gather around our living room fireplace on chilly winter evenings.

Several times a year, a family fallen on hard times would knock on our door. They were usually traveling north to find work in the factories. Their beat-up station wagon, filled with hungry, tired children, was out of gas. Dad had no money.

In this little community, we learned the joy of Christian hospitality. We offered these folks a hot meal. Others in our congregation pulled together to help. The owners of the town hotel always made a room available. The gas station owner filled up the car gas tank. The grocer supplied them with enough food to get them to Detroit, and we sent them on their way.

I think back on those days in the parsonage, wistfully. Yes, it was exasperating at times to live three doors down from the church. A few times I actually resented the open invitation people felt to drop by, unannounced. I can't honestly say I miss our lack of privacy in the parsonage. I do miss the opportunities to "entertain . . . angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2, KJV).

We feel a very real call to the ministry we now serve. We usually invite our visitors to our army quarters. Days or sometimes a week passes with no surprise guests. Our ministry is more scheduled and orderly and less spontaneous.

I do look forward to the promise of Jesus. It's not a parsonage, three doors down from the church. It's not the sterile, repetitive sameness of government housing, either. Instead, Jesus promises, "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2, KJV). ■



# Seeing by Faith

by Florence E. Parkes  
Upper Marlboro, Md.



**T**he harsh ring of the telephone interrupted our Sunday dinner, and my husband reached for the phone.

The message was brief. A mother's anguished voice pleaded, "Pastor, please come. Scotty's dying."

This was the third call within four days. Each time Les had rushed to the hospital. Twice Scott had rallied. Once again my husband grabbed his coat and hurried out, anxious to be with the family in their sorrow.

Scotty was the only son and the only sighted one in the family. His mother, Mary, is legally blind. George, his father, has been blind since birth. His little sister, Leanne, was also born blind.

Now 21 years of age, Scotty often had taken his sister to the park or shopping. He enjoyed running errands for his parents. Although cancer had ravaged his body and radiation and chemotherapy had debilitated him, he dreamed big dreams.

"Just wait 'til I get a good job," he promised, "I'll get a car and take you places. And I'll build you a nice house. You won't have to live in this crowded apartment anymore."

His spirit remained optimistic, but his parents realized sadly that his frail body was becoming weaker and

weaker. Trips to the hospital were more frequent and discouraging.

As Les wove in and out through the Sunday afternoon traffic, he was praying, "Dear Lord, be close to them now. Help me know how to comfort them."

It seemed to take longer than usual to get across the city. When he arrived at the hospital, the grieving family sobbed, "He's gone. Our Scotty's gone."

Taking them in his arms, Les prayed, "Our Father, we don't understand, and our hearts are filled with sorrow. Help us to remember that You care. We are thankful that Scotty loved You, and now he is free from his pain. Lord, give this dear family the healing comfort of Your own presence."

George and Mary didn't want to go back immediately to their empty house. So Les brought them home

with him. My heart was heavy, and I kept wiping my own tears away as I prepared a light supper. We tried to eat, and we listened as they shared memories with us.

While I cleared the table, Mary made her way to the piano. A medley of hymns flowed from her fingertips—"It Is Well with My Soul," "Amazing Love," "Blessed Assurance." The music seemed to comfort her. George sat quietly listening, his guide dog at his feet.

And then what was I hearing? The soft whirr of angel wings? The gentle voice of the Father comforting His child?

In a tremulous voice the heartbroken mother was softly singing,

*My faith has found a resting-place  
Not in device nor creed,  
I trust the Ever-living One,  
His wounds for me shall plead.  
I need no other argument,  
I need no other plea;  
It is enough that Jesus died,  
And that He died for me.*

Many times I had prayed that our parsonage-home would be a haven of encouragement and blessing to others. But that day God spoke to my heart through a mother's hymn of hope and trust, sung in the midst of her tears. ■



## On Using the Hymnal

by James L. Snyder

Glen Burnie, Md.

**I**t is in vogue these days to regard the old hymns of the church as outdated and irrelevant. After all, many of the selections in the hymnbook were written hundreds of years ago. How is it possible for these antiquated songs to be germane to today's upbeat, sophisticated society?

Admittedly, there are possible grounds for objecting to the prolific use of hymns in church services. Many hymns employ phrases and terms no longer understood by this generation of Christians. However, the language of most hymns is biblical. An honored tradition of the Church frames Christian praise and worship in the language of the Holy Scriptures. However, even this becomes a problem today because of the increasing biblical illiteracy among those who attend church services.

Also, some hymns may refer to spiritual experiences far removed from the average Christian. Consider, for example, words like:

*Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid?*

*Your heart does the Spirit control?*

*You can only be blest and have peace and sweet rest,*

*As you yield Him your body and soul.*

—Elisha A. Hoffman

and,

*I'm pressing on the upward way.*

*New heights I'm gaining every day,*

*Still praying as I onward bound,*

*"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."*

—Johnson Oatman, Jr.

Or look at the commitment to Christ called for in the following:

*All to Jesus I surrender;*

*All to Him I freely give.*

*I will ever love and trust Him,  
In His presence daily live.*

—Judson W. Van Deventer

and,

*Fully surrendered, Lord, I would be,*

*Fully surrendered, dear Lord, to Thee.*

*All on the altar laid,*

*Surrender fully made,*

*Thou hast my ransom paid;*

*I yield to Thee.*

Unfortunately, we live in a culture where increasingly the only acceptable type of commitment is where "I" receive the obvious benefit and where there is an out for "me" if it becomes inconvenient. Hymns such as "Take My Life, and Let It Be," "Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken," "Come, All Christians, Be Committed," and "Yielded to God" do not reflect current concerns among many church-going people.

Furthermore, some of the grand old hymns reflect a mystical tendency that is unacceptable in our materialistic, pragmatic society. The average person probably cannot passionately appreciate

*O Love that wilt not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in Thee.*

*I give Thee back the life I owe,  
That in Thine ocean depths its flow*

*May richer, fuller be.*

—George Matheson

or,



*My Lord, how full of sweet content  
I pass my years of banishment!*

*Where'er I dwell, I dwell with  
Thee,*

*In heaven, in earth, or on the sea.*

Such daring expressions from a God-intoxicated spirit may even shock some people.

Still, their other-worldly character gives some hymns their ultimate value. Dr. A. W. Tozer once commented:

A great hymn embodies the purest concentrated thoughts of some lofty saint who may have long ago gone from the earth and left little or nothing behind him except that hymn. To read or sing a true hymn is to join in the act of worship with a great and gifted soul in his moments of intimate devotion. It is to hear a lover of Christ explaining to his Savior why he loves Him; it is to listen in without embarrassment on the softest whisperings of undying love between the bride and the heavenly Bridegroom.

*(We Travel an Appointed Way)*

To scorn hymnody is to disregard and despise an important aspect of our spiritual heritage. Hymns have played an important part in the life and health of the Christian Church. Many of the most-loved hymns were born in the heat of revival when a fresh moving of the Holy Spirit was on the Church.

F. W. Boreham, in one of his essays, points out that "every religious quickening in the history of the ages has immortalized itself in song." Boreham illustrates his point by writing:

The spirit of the Hebrew devotion lingers in the Book of Psalms; the faith of the early Christians lives in the Te Deum; the choicest

*(Continued on page 52)*

## Broadening Our View of Baptism

by Victor W. Peters

Pasadena, Calif.



**T**he recent publication by the Nazarene Publishing House of Rob L. Staples' book, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace*, has called attention to the long-neglected subject of baptism within the Wesleyan/holiness tradition. This prompts me to venture sharing some thoughts of my own, which I trust are scripturally sound.

Some may shy away from this subject for fear of stirring up controversy. Yet surely Spirit-filled Christians can review their Bibles, perhaps retain differing opinions, and still love each other.

The mode of baptism may rank in relative importance close to the subject raised by the Samaritan woman. If she had said to the Master, "Our fathers practiced sprinkling, but You say immersion is the true mode," He could have answered, "Whether by sprinkling, pouring, or immersing, the Father seeks genuine repentance and faith."

In that spirit, the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*, in its article of faith on "Baptism," mentions that it "may be administered by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, according to the choice of the applicant" (1989, 36). I wonder how many of us ministers have been informing our people that they do have a choice. To justify scripturally this article of the *Manual*, may we take a fresh look at a few verses?

Can we find any warrant in the Bible for sprinkling? Take the incident recorded in John 1:25. A delegation from the Jewish ruling body is interrogating John the Baptist. "If you are not Immanuel or Elijah or 'that prophet'" (the one like unto Moses), they ask, "then why are you baptizing?" Note what this question implies.

**They expect the Messiah to baptize.** But why? Did they have a basis for such expectation? The only possible grounds are two prophecies, Isa. 52:15 and Ezek. 36:25. These messianic passages both specify "sprinkling" as an act of the Coming One. No Jew would have been surprised by this. Had not Moses dedicated the Tabernacle and the people by sprinkling (Heb. 9:19, 21)?

The Isa. 52:15 passage also explains why the Ethiopian in Acts 8:36 exclaimed, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" That word, "sprinkle," had given Philip his opportunity to offer instruction on the subject of baptism.

And what other than sprinkling could the Jews have practiced when, according to Mark 7:4, they baptized tables or beds? I know the word for table or bed does not appear in some manuscripts, but its inclusion in some proves early Greek writers could apply the word "baptize" to ceremonial sprinkling (compare Luke 11:38).

Does pouring find biblical support? Consider what took place on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus had commanded His followers to wait for "the promise of the Father" that they "shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4, 5, RSV). We are not left in doubt how that baptism was administered. Acts 2:3-4; 8:15-17; and 10:44-45 report what took place among the Jews, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles. Then in 11:15 Peter declares the experience was the same for both Jew and Gentile. "On the Gentiles also was **poured** out the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 10:45, KJV).

To clinch the whole matter, Peter says, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel . . . I will **pour** out of my Spirit" (Acts 2:16-17, KJV).

The original prophecy (Joel 2:28-29) employs the word "**pour**," twice. Putting together the relevant passages along with Isa. 32:15 and Prov. 1:23, I find baptism described seven times as a pouring, three times as a falling of the Spirit, and twice as a receiving.

What Peter says in Acts 11:16 deserves more attention than it gets. There he tells us what it was that jogged his memory about the Lord's promise of a baptism. It was nothing other than the **falling** of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit "**fell**" (v. 15, KJV), something clicked in Peter's mind. "Oh! this is the promised baptism!"

This tells us what Peter was expecting the baptism to be like. He held a mental picture of a descent from above, not a submerging into something below. And how natural it should be so, for Peter was thoroughly acquainted with the many Old Testament accounts like Judg. 3:10. The consistent expression was, "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him."

As Dr. Staples observes, "The distinctive element of Christian baptism is the bestowal of the Holy Spirit." A baptismal candidate, understanding this, could be led into a profound experience of God's presence when submitting to outpoured water. An awesome opportunity presents itself to us ministers here.

Now what about immersion? Those who practice it rely for support partly upon the meaning of the Greek word for "baptize." It may mean to immerse. But we need not be Greek scholars to observe, as we have done already, that New Testament writers apply the word to acts of sprinkling and pouring also. Note, moreover, that 1 Pet. 3:20-21 and 1 Cor. 10:1-2 refer to two Old Testament events that throw light on the meaning of

baptism; namely, Noah's flood and Moses' crossing of the Red Sea. In both cases it is those who did *not* enter the water who were saved.

Those who immerse rely heavily on Rom. 6:4. We have heard that verse quoted at so many baptismal services, many of us have come to assume it is a verse about immersion. We have only to read the whole paragraph beginning at verse 1 to see Paul is not discussing baptism at all. He is simply saying, "When you were baptized, something radical happened to you. Now act like it." Why not take Rom. 6:4 for what it is, a holiness text, and preach a sermon or two on the blessedness of the resurrected life? For us of the Wesleyan/holiness tradition, this should be a welcome response.

While we are at it, we shall remind our people being "dead to sin" is only one of **many metaphors** in Scripture picturing what takes place when one surrenders to Christ. Rom. 6:4 belongs to a group of verses like Col. 2:11-12, 20; 3:1, 3, 9-10; Gal. 3:27; 2:19-20; 2 Cor. 5:17; 11:2; Eph. 2:4-6, 12-13, 19; John 15:4; Isa. 61:3; Ezek. 11:19. Buried, raised, crucified, alive, united, espoused, married, aliens, citizens, far off, near, new garments for old, branches of the Vine, beauty for ashes. Let us not impoverish ourselves by assuming baptism symbolizes only one figure out of this lavish array.

When Paul uses the phrase "buried by baptism," I take it he has no particular mode of baptism in mind. As Dr. Staples says, in the Early Church saving faith and baptism were almost synonymous. Paul is merely telling us when a believer comes to the point of stepping out publicly and declaring his allegiance to Jesus, something wonderful transpires in his life that can be described as (among many other things) a rising to new life. As Dr. Staples asserts (p. 274), in baptism (by any mode) the old sinful life is "buried" with Christ.

Regardless of the mode employed, I commend Dr. Staples' exhortation: "The baptized need to be presented to the congregation during a worship service" (p. 271). The congregation should pledge its commitment and support. I knew a pastor who, at every reception of new baptismal candidates, always requested the congregation to stand and repeat with them the Apostles' Creed. ■

# Seven Steps to Avoid Ministry Burnout

by Montford L. Neal

Bristow, Okla.

**I**n a time when there is so much stress within the ministry, it is good to look at some ways to soften the blow of the daily grind. These simple suggestions may help you take a new look at your ministerial approach.

## 1. Focus your attention on God's long-range plan for your life and ministry.

This creates space for creative work and allows one to see that God can work longitudinally with your ministry. It takes the stress out of the daily activity.

## 2. Face the fact that you are not alone in your work.

Others can contribute to the same causes you do and have abilities similar or equal to yours and can assist the Kingdom work. You need not think that heaven will lose all if you are not able to function at a steady, fast-paced ministry.

## 3. Feature into your life some things that are not of any special worth.

To put it another way, plan things that are trivial and are not evaluated or viewed as necessary to your ministerial function, but enjoyable. Learn a sporting skill, learn to cook, take walks, travel, or spend special, even guarded time in recreation.

## 4. Failure is possible and will happen in the best-laid plans.

Do not quit, get uptight, or punish yourself for plans, ideas, programs, sermons, or other Christian endeavors that, by your own admission, miserably fail. Get up and try again. Per-

haps you need to see that some things just do not work as you have planned. Learn to accept this as a time of growing.

## 5. Fellowship with others of your same calling.

Arrange time for reflection, prayer, and sharing of concerns. This friend, peer, or group of colleagues can provide a time when you can have adequate empathy for your concerns and share openly your heart's pain, joy, or burdens.

## 6. Follow a plan that gives you an opportunity to attend workshops, seminars, or other training or retraining activities that will strengthen your skills in ministry.

## 7. Facilitate diversification of life's interest.

Ministry offers one an opportunity to stretch. You are given many opportunities to broaden your interest. This is not to be confused with having two vocations, but adding to your main skill and gifts. A seasoned pastor may wish to go on a short missionary assignment. An evangelist may wish to serve as pastor for a short period of time. ■



## What Do Baby Boomers Want from Church?

by Stephen Franklin  
Fredericton, N.B.

A common missionary principle is to make the gospel relevant to a target group by presenting it in the context of their culture. This crucial principle to successful evangelism makes it as easy as possible for people to accept Christ Jesus as Savior. For example, if we begin a Haitian church, we would use their language and phraseology and worship to their music styles. To be effective, we would study hard to understand their way of seeing the world. We would attempt to gain an understanding of their values, beliefs, and attitudes. We would seek to discover their deepest needs and to present the gospel in the way that they could most easily understand and accept it.

George G. Hunter says in his book *To Spread the Power*, "Our task is to 're-wrap' the gospel in the clothing of their culture, to convey it in a vessel that will transport the gospel's meaning to them."

Differences between cultures means that the way that one group understands and responds to its world will not be the same way that the culture next to it will understand and respond. Differences in how they view life also means differences in how they perceive and respond to the gospel. If you want to minister in a way that is most natural and most easily understandable, it requires different methods and different kinds of churches to reach them. Not only is this true of cultures; it is also necessary for many subcultures as well. For example, white-collar and blue-collar subcultures represent two different mind-sets. Each requires different approaches in evangelism and ministry.

Baby boomers in North America are a subculture needing to be better understood in order to be effectively



reached. They are unique from previous generations in their values, their attitudes, and their beliefs. It may seem strange to consider a group of "our own kind" a subculture. After all, we are the same nationality and the same color, and we speak the same language. Nonetheless, there are distinct differences. Persons who grew up in the '50s and '60s grew up during turbulent times of change. Those were times that made radical impressions on children and teens. Adults during those decades shrugged it off as a phenomenon. But those growing up in it were marked and shaped by the crosscurrents of change. That gen-



eration emerged into adulthood very different from the previous generation—different enough that most of them will not be effectively reached by traditional methods and approaches used by many churches today.

Through a door-to-door community needs assessment survey conducted in our city by our church and research into the sociology of baby boomers, the following points have emerged clearly as the things that baby boomers want or need from church.

### 1. They need a religion that is relevant.

Young adults today have very little concern about eternity. They focus almost exclusively on the here and now, and they focus on it with great intensity. Evidence of this attitude is seen in the proliferation of self-help books on the market. Self-improvement remains an insatiable hunger in today's society.

The gospel is much more than a glorified self-help program, but we can meet a great need among young adults by showing them the practicality of the gospel in everyday life. To reach baby boomers, you have to answer the question for them, "How will this make my life better today?"

### 2. They need a church targeted to them.

This idea represents several crucial elements.

#### A. Music

Worship is most meaningful to them when expressed in the music with which the worshiper feels most natural. As this is true on the mission field, it is equally true here at home. Young adults need forms of worship that reflect who they are in God, not who their parents are.



## B. Programming

Programs and ministries meaningful to young families today are those that meet felt needs. Probably one of the most universally felt needs for this group is a high-quality ministry to their children. Another need is guidance in relationships. We need to focus on where they feel needs.

## C. Scheduling

In our survey the number one reason people gave for not attending church is that they are too busy. Baby boomers are caught up in an overwhelming rat race of things to do and in which to be involved. The boomers are probably the generation with the most free time, yet they are the generation with the least spare time. The key word to survival in most households is flexibility. This must be a key word in our churches if we do an effective job of evangelism. The needs and schedules of people will have to replace tradition in establishing the times and frequency of our worship services and ministries if we expect these people to take part.

## 3. They need a firm but gentle presentation of the gospel.

Our survey asked people the following question, "If you could give one piece of advice to churches today, what would that advice be?"

The number one answer was

"Don't be pushy." The second most common answer was "Be relevant." The children of the '50s and '60s were the first generation of children to grow up with a daily bombardment of television advertisement aimed directly at them. As a result, a survival mode of resistance to pressure was quickly developed and is still a very real part of their lives today. Today's young adults highly resist pressure.

**"The gospel is much more than a glorified self-help program."**

Another characteristic of this group is their resistance to guilt. Growing up in times that saw a resurgence of moral relativism saw to that.

It is crucial to remember that while we are adapting our methods of mission, we must never in any way adapt our message. This boomer generation needs the message of salvation from

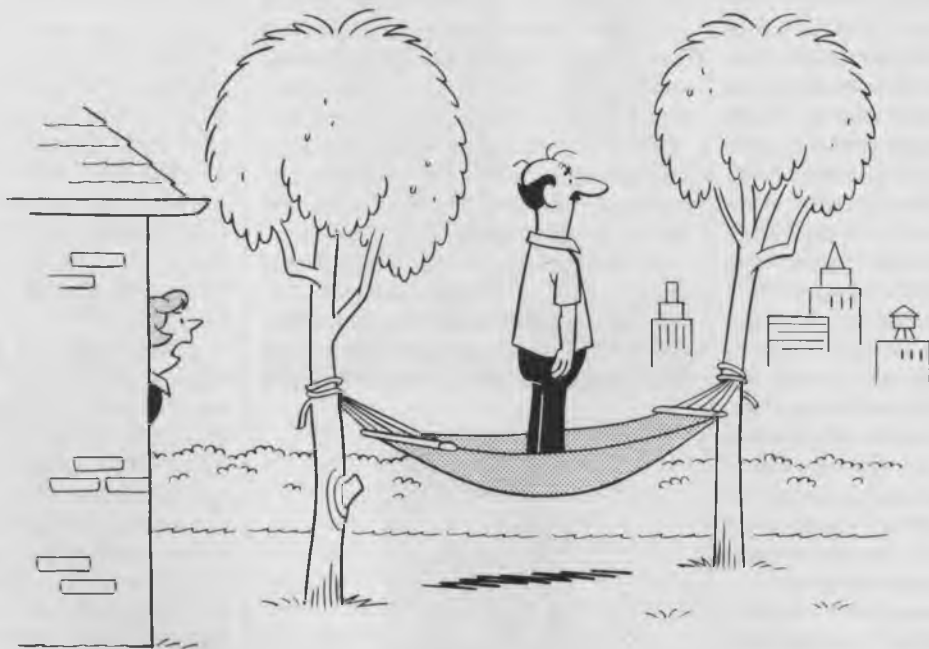
sin through the death of Jesus Christ as much as any generation. However, they will not respond positively to either pressure or guilt. The message must be presented powerfully and clearly, then they must be left to work through their decision. We need to help and encourage, but not push.

## 4. They need a logical presentation of the gospel.

Baby boomers have been indoctrinated throughout their education to the scientific method. They have been taught to examine everything to see if it stands up to scrutiny. Therefore, "blind faith" is extremely hard for them.

Fortunately the gospel yields itself very well to the tests of logic. It is a logical and reasonable faith. This must be demonstrated to the deductive minds of today. Emotion-based messages will result in very little life change. To reach baby boomers, you must put out the gospel to their examination and be prepared for their questions.

Some people feel that baby boomers are not open to the gospel. The exciting fact is that today's young adults are not as disinterested in Christianity as one might think. Rather, they need a church that understands them and their subculture and that is able to "'rewrap' the gospel in the clothing of their culture." ■



**"FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, FRED, LEARN TO RELAX."**

## Practical Tools for the 1990s

by L. Wayne Quinn

*District Superintendent  
Church of the Nazarene  
Florida Space Coast District*

**T**he “warehouse church” principle has many advantages for beginning a new church congregation. In the last 20 years, costs of developing home mission churches have increased enormously, especially in the United States and Canada. Consequently, most districts have had to cut back on their new church planting, reasoning that one good project would be better than three smaller starting attempts. The “warehouse church” can bridge several problems in the beginning stages of a new congregation.

It takes three principles to build a church in today’s sociological climate: (1) spiritual atmosphere, (2) adequate square footage, and (3) adequate parking spaces. The average new church cannot afford an adequate new building for worship, educational facilities, and fellowship area. In some cases, a district is strong enough to secure facilities that are adequate. However, many new church starts are very slow to develop the proper atmosphere that is conducive to growth. Consequently the district eventually may have to close that choice unit, sell out, and start over. This is where the “warehouse church” comes into the picture. Necessary square footage in a prominent shopping mall is an excellent place to start. Two ingredients for growth are built in—plenty of square footage and parking. The only other ingredient that we need here is a spiritual atmosphere. People coming together to praise and worship the Lord Jesus Christ with a Spirit-filled pastor find that a spiritual atmosphere occurs.

In Florida, we are presently securing warehouse square footage for about 30¢ on the dollar of the going market price. There are businessmen

out there who desire to make a contribution to your church if you will only ask.

West Melbourne Church of the Nazarene gives a concrete example of one of our “warehouse churches” on the Florida Space Coast District. A young pastor and his family, Al and Trish Frank, with another young couple, the Kermit Hudsons, serving in music, moved to Florida in 1989. They began West Melbourne Church with 12 people in a small, traditional church building that would seat 70. After four months, the district helped them move out on the main street into a high-profile warehouse, located next door to the Waffle House. They then had 2½ acres of concrete parking and 8,000 square feet of building. At the time of moving into this warehouse, they were averaging 60 people in worship. Twenty-three months later, they moved out of their first warehouse. On Labor Day Sunday, 1991, I, the district superintendent, was asked to preach at their final service before moving into their new 20,000-square-foot second warehouse. I preached to 360 people on that Sunday morning.

Remember the three ingredients that it takes to build a church? (1) The atmosphere was absolutely electric! (2) Eight thousand square feet was adequate for the 360 people

present. (3) Seeing the deputy sheriff parking cars in their parking lot was beautiful.

The West Melbourne Church has made a request to change its name to Cathedral Church of the Nazarene, Melbourne, Fla.

On September 15, 1991, they moved 275 people into their third new facility of 20,000 square feet. The warehouse was formerly a large computer operation. The main computer room seats 450 people. In order to make this warehouse take on the appearance of a sanctuary, the congregation secured 95 feet of velvet drapery and a new baby grand piano on the platform, along with a 40-voice choir, plus a staff of six pastors, all of which are volunteers except the senior pastor. This church uses six worship leaders. Every four to six minutes they have a personnel change of worship leaders.

Now let’s go back to the three ingredients for building a church. First, with six worship leaders, all of which have their special expertise, plus 300 worshipers, with the reality of the presence of the Lord Jesus, the spiritual atmosphere is genuine. Second, they occupy 20,000 square feet. Third, the church has parking spaces for 150 cars.

Evangelism is at the heart of starting these high-profile churches in warehouses. People are hungry to know the Word of God and to know Jesus. In 27 months, this new church has had some of the finest preachers to hold short revival meetings—Dr. Steve Manley, Dr. Earl Lee, Dr. Raymond Hurn, Dr. Charles Millhuff, and Dr. Eugene Stowe. The Holy Spirit has been honored in new methods with the blessed old-time gospel, and it is paying off. ■



# Seven Ways to Avoid Costly Building Mistakes

by Ray Bowman

*Larkspur, Colo.*

with Eddy Hall

*Goessel, Kans.*

**Y**ou can see our problem," the pastor said, motioning toward the empty pews. "This auditorium seats 400; we seldom hit 150. Sunday mornings this place feels almost as empty as it does right now. Our little group rattling around in here week after week gets to be depressing. I'm convinced it's keeping us from growing. Our board is hoping you can recommend a way to remodel this sanctuary to make it smaller, warmer, more comfortable. Then maybe we can grow."

How had this situation come about? Twenty years earlier church leaders had said, "If we build a big sanctuary, people will come to fill it." They had built the building, but the people hadn't come.

I could have drawn up plans for corrective remodeling, but the church, still saddled with debt from that earlier building, couldn't have afforded it. Because they expected the building to generate growth, they built too big too soon.

Another church faced the opposite problem. Innovative ministries to teens and young adults had attracted new people. Every Sunday saw double worship services and Sunday School, with classes spilling over into the parsonage and the restaurant next door. Their full-to-overflowing buildings testified to the excitement of belonging to this church family.



But their growth had bumped against the limits of their space. With no more room, growth had stopped. Not only were they crowded, but one building—the one the teens used—was leaky, poorly heated, and structurally unsafe. This church was facing the problem of too little too late.

Building too big too soon and building too little too late are both

costly mistakes, but both can be avoided. In my consulting work, I recommend that churches follow seven steps to plan their buildings wisely.

### 1. Know your community.

A church on the West Coast was considering whether to build. When I asked what future ministries they envisioned, they mentioned, among other things, a ministry for the poor, perhaps a soup kitchen or clothing closet. But when the pastor checked the local demographics, he found that almost no poor families lived in the neighborhood. Instead, the church's neighborhood was attracting upper-income families. His people, this pastor realized, were fantasizing about ministry to a group not even present in their community.

The pastor believed that to reach their neighborhood, they needed a building appropriate to their changing surroundings. Their older, poorly maintained facility with an amateur-looking sign tacked to its side hardly looked inviting to their upwardly mobile neighbors. I suspected the pastor was right when, as I spoke to the congregation, mice scampered across the platform and ran beneath the pews in front of me.

This congregation awoke to what they needed to do and did it. The last I heard they were getting ready for a neighborhood get-acquainted party to introduce themselves to their "future

members." For the occasion they planned to raise a big, brightly colored tent on the site where their new building would soon appear.

Before your church can tailor its ministries and facilities to those it hopes to reach, you must first get to know the needs of your community.

**They built the building, but the people didn't come.**

## **2. Evaluate current and long-term needs.**

To find out how well current facilities serve a church's ministries, I recommend an effectiveness review. Write down on the floor plan of your building what happens in each room during the various hours of the week. Then identify anything needed to improve each ministry's effectiveness. Does it need new leadership? Additional training or support for leaders? More money?

Since facilities are often blamed for nonfacility needs, it's important to identify nonfacility needs first. It's pointless, for example, to try to revitalize the church's ministry to teens by building or remodeling a meeting space if the fundamental problem with that ministry is unqualified leadership.

Once nonfacility needs have been separated from facility needs, the next step is to create an itemized list of space needs, both immediate and long-term. For each ministry, include how much space is needed and what kind of facility would work best.

Sometimes defining facility needs involves more than determining the amount and kind of space needed. A church near New York City had a major ministry to the poor, the homeless, and runaway teens. Even with two services, they had outgrown their sanctuary, so they bought land to build. On further reflection, though, they realized that relocation would separate them from the very people to whom they were minister-

ing. While they needed more space, the *location* of that space was critical. They sold the new land and used the money to remodel their worship space. By fully using space in two adjacent houses and a commercial building, they were able to expand in the same location.

The process of itemizing current and long-term facility needs is valuable to any church. For the church considering major remodeling or new construction, this step must be completed before an architect can draw up appropriate plans. For both churches considering building and those that are not, this process lays the groundwork for using present space more effectively.

## **3. Use present facilities to the maximum.**

Once a church has clearly defined its space needs, it's ready to find ways to meet those needs. That search should always begin at the same place—the church's present buildings. Churches that think they're running out of room are often surprised to learn that they can double or triple in size without a major building program simply by changing how they think about and use their present space. Until a church is fully utilizing its existing building, a need for more space simply doesn't exist. Here are some ways to solve space problems without new facilities.

Move groups to the right-size rooms. Many churches have at least one little class in a big room and one big class in a little room.

Change the group size to fit the room. When a group outgrows its room, sometimes it works to divide the class. Or if a church has small classes in big rooms, a different teaching method may solve the problem. Large-group team teaching may make better use of space *and* improve learning. Some children's classes can grow in the same room by adding an assistant teacher.

Change furniture. You can increase worship seating as much as 20 percent by replacing pews with individual seating. If that seating is movable, the space also becomes available for multiple use.

A room that uses appropriate tables and chairs can hold twice as many people as one filled with overstuffed

furniture. For preschool or kindergarten classes, the solution may be to get rid of the furniture and have the children sit on a carpeted floor for their activities. Oversize play equipment—such as a slide—may be wasting space. If full-size cribs are eating up needed nursery space, replace them with half-size or stacked cribs.

Find new uses for any space not already fully used. One of the first places to look is the worship area. A church in Pennsylvania with excess worship seating removed several back rows and installed room dividers, carving out space for a foyer, a fellowship area, and a Sunday School class.

A foyer can be ideal for receptions, board meetings, or Sunday School class dinners. Some churches use folding walls to divide large foyers for Sunday School space, then open them back up before people arrive for worship. The foyer of one church in Kansas City doubles as an office reception area. Along one wall—in space not otherwise used—they've installed six staff and secretarial modules.

Consider what minor remodeling can do. Can you increase usable space by taking a wall out? Putting a wall in? Installing a folding wall across part of the foyer? Enclosing a hallway with a folding wall?

Build a storage building. If you are using potential meeting rooms for storage, this is an inexpensive way to free up space in a hurry.

**Facilities are often blamed for nonfacility problems.**

Use creative scheduling. A children's ministry brought in scores of children from the community. Because they met on Saturday, they could use the only space big enough to hold the group—the worship area.

In addition to multiple Sunday services and Sunday School sessions, how about an additional worship ser-

vice on a weeknight? One church I visited has Monday evening "Sunday School." Not only is this good stewardship, but also it ministers to those who can't come on Sundays.

**Surprise: You can double or triple in size without a major building program—by changing how you think about and use your present building.**

#### **4. Use alternate space.**

Every community has meeting space that churches may use, often just for the asking—homes, motel party rooms, schools, lodge halls, community rooms in banks or apartment complexes. Young singles classes often work better in restaurants than in church buildings. Some people who are uncomfortable coming to a church building will gladly participate in groups that meet elsewhere.

#### **5. Consider a modest addition.**

A Massachusetts congregation started holding double worship services, but a lot of people were unhappy with the arrangement because they couldn't visit with friends who attended the other service. Recognizing the importance of such fellowship, the church made two changes: first, they extended the period between services to 30 minutes to give worshipers leaving the first service time to visit with those arriving for the second; and, second, they built a larger foyer to provide a place to visit. While neither change by itself would have done the

job, providing both time and space for fellowship solved the problem.

A modest addition may also be called for when multiple staff are working out of a building originally designed with office space for only one pastor. When professional and support staff offices are scattered, teamwork suffers, and the staff is less accessible to the public. While some congregations can create a centralized administrative complex by remodeling, others will need to consider an addition.

#### **6. Repair and redecorate.**

A church building should feel warm, pleasant, and comfortable. In a word, it should look loved. When a new pastor came to a church in upstate New York, he found a badly neglected building. Years before, the congregation had realized they needed to relocate and bought land elsewhere. They then quit spending money on maintaining their old building. Partly because of the unloved appearance of the church building, the congregation had quit growing. But until the congregation grew, it would not be able to afford to build.

This pastor, then, was able to challenge the people to repair and redecorate their old building as a necessary step toward resuming their growth. They cleaned out junk, replaced outdated signs on classroom doors, put new furniture in the nursery, and fixed the plumbing. Once again, their building looks loved. It no longer stands in the way of growth.

#### **7. Seek creative parking solutions.**

When one church needed more parking, a doctor in the church offered the parking lot at his clinic two blocks away. The church leaders agreed to park there to free parking space at the church.

A church near Philadelphia uses stacked parking: members volunteer to park bumper to bumper at the back of the lot and wait patiently when it's time to go home. This leaves the most convenient parking for visitors.

Can you use the school parking lot across the street? The shopping center down the block? Could you create a "park and ride" center a half mile away, with the church providing a shuttle bus? Most parking problems, however stubborn they may at first

appear, have solutions.

While all these solutions to parking problems have been used successfully, several of them also create inconvenience for church members. It's the same with some of the other space solutions suggested such as multiple use of space, movable furnishings, use of alternate space, and meeting at nontraditional times. I've discovered that a distinguishing mark of practically every growing church is that the people of the church are willing to be inconvenienced for the work of the church. When church members aren't willing to volunteer for some inconveniences, the church is unlikely to grow.

Solomon wrote, "Any enterprise is built by wise planning, becomes strong through common sense, and profits wonderfully by keeping abreast of the facts" (Prov. 24:3-4, TLB). These seven suggestions are no magic formula. They simply represent wise planning, common sense, and a way to keep abreast of the facts. Churches that apply them can avoid the most common and costly building mistakes.

**Communities have meeting space that churches may use—just for the asking.**

A church that keeps current on steps one and two won't be taken by surprise when it needs to build. A church that makes full use of its present space—steps three through seven—won't rush into an unnecessary building program.

By following these seven suggestions, a church can avoid either building too little too late, or too big too soon, and can, instead, build just the right building at just the right time. ■

This article is taken from *When Not to Build: An Architect's Unconventional Wisdom for the Growing Church*, by Ray Bowman with Eddy Hall, published by Baker Book House, 1992.



## Walking the Razor's Edge: Thoughts About Balancing a Ministry

by Robert A. Waldrup  
Belmont, N.C.



Ministers should get “hazardous duty” pay. Recently Operation Desert Storm participants were constantly exposed to risk and, therefore, eligible for extra compensation called “hazardous duty” pay. Ministers constantly face risk. If there is no risk, we probably are not doing our jobs because ministering carries nothing that resembles a “no-risk, money-back guarantee.” In fact, the opposite is true. Otherwise God would only have suggested, “It may be advisable to inquire into the feasibility of wearing some type of protection.” Instead, He commanded, “Put on the whole armour of God” (Eph. 6:11, KJV). He knew the risks.

“I don’t know what to do,” the woman sobbed as she sought the pastor’s counsel. Pouring her heart out, she described her marital problems. The next day the woman’s infuriated husband stomped into the pastor’s study and promptly delivered telling blows to the pastor’s face. Hazardous duty? “Why,” he demanded, “have you been running around with my wife?” More hazardous duty! It seems the woman had psychological problems and accused the pastor of sexual advances. This particular type of hazardous duty—with variations—has been around for a long time. Remember Joseph and Potiphar’s wife? Risk? Hazardous duty? Yes, but there are more subtle risks.

One such risk involves staring from the razor’s whetted edge into the

How do  
I acquire  
authority?

void of humility on one side and the void of authority on the other. The risk is in correctly discerning when to act boldly with authority and when to act in humility. Sometimes we come into a situation “shooting and shouting” when we ought to be “looking and listening.” Conversely, at other times we cower vacillating when we should proclaim the message daringly and in no uncertain terms.



“Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 16:9, KJV), the man in the dream beseeched Paul. Paul had been stopped from impetuously entering Asia at least twice. Finally, he got it right. I can almost hear Paul as he slaps his forehead, “Oh yes, Macedonia, not Asia. Now I understand!” Walking the razor’s edge engenders error and, thereby, the Holy Spirit teaches us. He never pushes or coerces but suggests and leads.

Paul, having learned a lesson, later writes about those “who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Heb. 5:14, NASB).

Learning to walk the whetted edge between humility and authority comes only through practice and training. There is no way around it: If we are to minister, we *will* walk the razor. Consequently, we must also find a balance between the authority of “Thus saith the Lord” and “serving the Lord with all humility” (Acts 20:19, KJV). Therefore, it is a matter of taking the risk (practice) so that the Holy Spirit may train us to balance (discern) between what is I and what is God.

It would be great to hit a home run in the World Series or make a touchdown in the Super Bowl or be a world champion in some other sport. Michael Jordan, star of professional basketball’s Chicago Bulls, didn’t even make his junior high school team the first time he tried out for it.

Why? Not enough experience! Nevertheless, with determination and much practice he is today, probably, the sport's most talked-about star.

Sometimes we miss the fact that long years of painful practice and discipline go into being able to participate. Michael Jordan didn't make the team because he didn't have the experience. He didn't know when to go boldly for the point and when to bide his time for a better opportunity. Practice gave him that experience. Similarly, we cannot expect to have balance without practice.

"That's fine for Michael and Paul, but what about me?" you say. "Where and how do I acquire authority?"

Just as with Paul, our authority comes as a God-given grace-gift for building up the Body of Christ, not for personal edification. On our part, authorization is passive; it is a charisma. We learn from Paul that three criteria must be met before we can be given authority.

First, we must be "in Christ" and hence a legitimate heir of God the Father (Eph. 3:6, NKJV). This criterion takes precedence.

Second, if it's not in the Book, there can be no authorization. The act must agree with the Word—the Bible. Be a Berean: "Search . . . the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things [are] so" (Acts 17:10-11, NKJV). Ask this question: "Is this action sanctioned, validated, advocated, permitted, or commanded by the Holy Scripture?" Is the answer doubtful? If so, we would do well to prayerfully examine our alternatives.

Third, we must be at liberty to exercise authority. Paul argues, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (1 Cor. 10:23, KJV). We may have freedom to act as we choose; however, we are not at liberty to do so until the Holy Spirit tells us, "Now is the time to exercise your God-given authority in accordance with God's Word." Anyone can force the way. Some, knowing better, forge ahead anyway, invariably, sometimes irreparably, harming the Body of Christ.

To paraphrase Santayana, "Those who will not remember history are condemned to repeat it." How then do we benefit from Paul's example of the process of learning humility and

authority? First, we need to prepare. Acquire as much information as it takes to do the job. Paul spent years studying: formally at the feet of Gamaliel; informally in the deserts of Arabia.

Second, don't hurry. Give the Holy Spirit a chance to do what He needs to do. Paul waited 14 years to communicate "unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles" (Gal. 2:2, KJV). Albert Einstein said, "Premature responsibility breeds superficiality [and disaster]."<sup>1</sup> Although we can usurp authority, God will not give us responsibilities prematurely.

Third, admit, "I am not omniscient." Don't be afraid to tell someone, no matter how adamant they may be, "Let me pray and meditate about it before I give an answer."

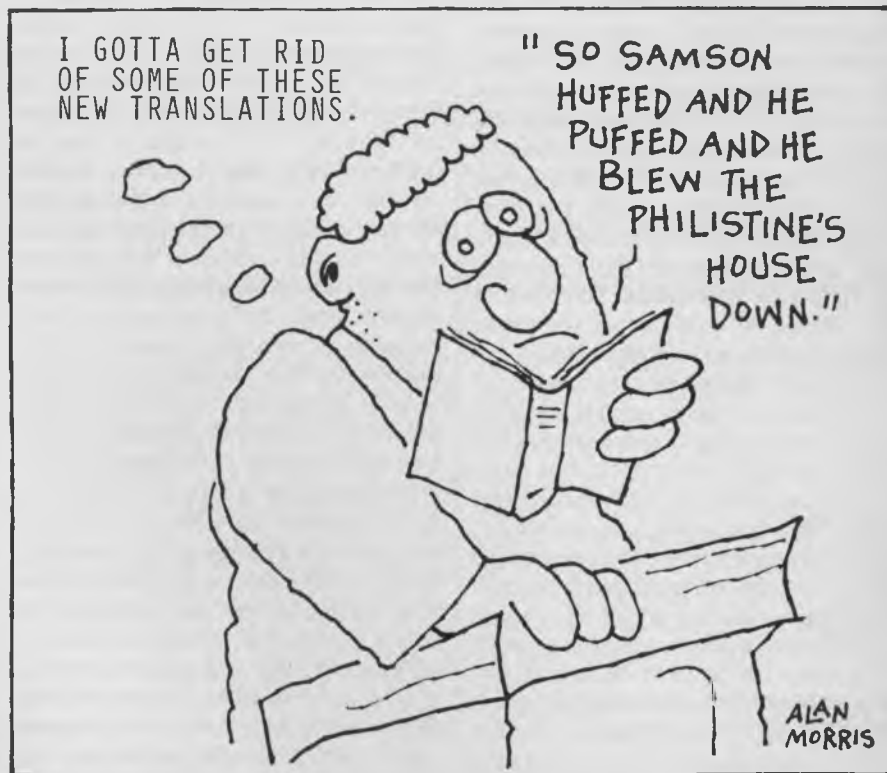
Fourth, ego should never stand in the way of ministering. If I find myself in a situation in which I do not feel competent, I do not hesitate to admit it.

A talented young man majored in college art. But, in his sophomore year, his art began to change. To a portrait of a young lady was added a

dagger piercing bloodily through her head. To a tranquil pastoral landscape might be added a nest of vipers looking as a bodiless Medusa. When the parents consulted their pastor about the situation, the pastor found himself to be over his head. He began to seek out professionally trained counselors and psychologists who had God-given gifts that he did not have. The schizophrenic man, no longer young, is now on medication. A long delay in getting him the right kind of help might have resulted in a dangerous situation. If the pastor had insisted, "I can handle it," someone might have come to harm.

Walking the razor's keen edge of risk is a daily experience for any who minister. Although the Lord will often ask us to reach out in faith, never will He ask us to overextend ourselves. This process of risk, Holy Spirit-guided assessment, and inculcation of a principle to live by teaches us balance. *Grant us, God, the wisdom to walk the razor, balanced between humility and authority.* ■

1. Quoted by Rick Joyner, *There Were Two Trees* (Charlotte, N.C.: Morningstar Publications, 1986), 75.



## Strategies for Structuring Ministerial Compensation

Submitted by the Board of Pensions and Benefits USA of the Church of the Nazarene

**A** review of the patterns of ministerial compensation over several decades would indicate that significant changes have taken place. Gone are the days when the majority of ministers received a large portion of their compensation in the form of food and clothing supplied by members of the congregation. The implications of the 1986 Tax Reform Act and subsequent IRS regulations are among the reasons for these changes.

### The Impact of the 1986 Tax Reform Act

The 1986 Tax Reform Act was the most significant change in tax law since its last major overhaul in 1954. Along with many other things for which it is blamed, the act's revisions made it much more difficult for ministers to avoid paying income taxes on unreimbursed business expenses. For example, unreimbursed automobile expenses no longer can be deducted dollar for dollar from compensation but must be deducted as a part of itemized deductions on Schedule A. With the new higher standard deduction allowance, many parsonage families find it impossible to itemize deductions. The result is an increase in income tax for those ministers who can no longer deduct unreimbursed automobile expenses.

The same problem applies to many of the business and professional expenses a minister incurs in the exercise of ministry. In addition to the higher standard deduction allowance, these expenses must also exceed 2 percent of the adjusted gross income reported on the federal tax return. Entertainment expenses that have previously been 100 percent deductible are now only 80 percent deductible if not reimbursed. These changes should cause many ministers to reevaluate their compensation structuring.

### IRS Regulations Adopted December 14, 1990

Requirements for business expense reimbursements changed with IRS Regulations adopted December 14, 1990 [section 1.62-2(d)(3)]. These requirements apply to *every* church and affect all employees. For many churches, this was a substantial change in the way business reimbursements are accounted for and paid to the employee. Furthermore, these requirements are not optional—they *must be followed*, or the church employee will be required to pay significantly greater amounts of *unnecessary* taxes.

The IRS regulations require that business reimbursements be included on Form W-2 as taxable income to the individual **unless** paid through an "accountable reimbursement plan" that has been formally adopted by the church board. The requirements for the accountable reimbursement plan are twofold: (1) The church may reimburse only those business expenses that an employee substantiates within 60 days of the expenditure with receipts and/or in writing as to the date, amount, place, and business nature; and (2) the employee will need to return any "excess" reimbursements (i.e., unused expense advances) within 120 days of the expenditure. The excess reimbursement may not be treated as a bonus or gift.

The Form W-2 income cannot simply be reduced "after the fact." Perhaps the greatest change in reimbursing business expenses under an accountable reimbursement plan is that the IRS will not allow the reimbursements to be paid through a retroactive reduction of salary reported on the employee's Form W-2. In order for reimbursements to be paid and qualify under an accountable reimbursement plan,

properly substantiated expense reimbursements must be paid separately from the employee's salary.

### The Cost of a Minister vs. the Cost of a Ministry

For too long, churches and ministers have lumped together into a single concept the "cost of a minister" and the "cost of a ministry." These are actually two distinct concepts. For proper planning and church budgeting they must be kept separate.

The "cost of a ministry" includes those costs related to the work of the minister and are properly a part of local church expenses. Among these are the expenses that will be incurred without regard to which minister is serving the congregation at a particular time.

On the other hand, the "cost of a minister" relates to those items that are directly and indirectly related to compensating the particular pastor serving the church at the current time. These costs include the general categories of employee benefits and actual salary.

The *least* advantageous way for a minister to be paid is to be given a lump sum amount out of which the minister must provide for professional expenses, employee benefits, and cash salary. Unfortunately, in most situations where these are lumped together, both the local church and the minister assume that the total amount of the "package" is compensation. In reality, part is for the "cost of the ministry" and another part is for the "cost of a minister."

### What Is the Cost of a Ministry?

The following list includes business and professional expenses that are identified with the "cost of a ministry." They should be recognized and budgeted as local church expenses, *not* compensation.

When the minister is expected to

pay for these items out of the amount provided in the church's "package," it will result in the parsonage family having to pay higher taxes on money

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## The *least* advantageous way for a minister to be paid is to be given a lump sum amount.

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they used to operate the local church's ministry. However, when these items are "reimbursed" through an accountable reimbursement plan (even if it means dividing the minister's previous "package" into two distinct amounts), it will usually result in lower taxes, a more accurate reflection of the minister's real compensation, and a simpler tax return to file.

The cost of maintaining ministry includes the following business and professional expense reimbursements:

- Automobile
- Continuing Education
- Convention
- Hospitality
- Pastor's Professional Library
- Dues to Professional Organizations
- Church Supplies (birthday cards, postage, etc.)
- Pastor's gifts "expected" to be given to members (wedding, baby, etc.)

### What Is the Cost of a Minister?

The "cost of a minister" is made up of appropriate employee benefits, provision for housing, and the actual cash salary paid.

Some of the items that are related to these are not discretionary, since the minister and family have no choice as to how the money is spent. The items of a nondiscretionary nature include most of the employee benefits listed below. However, many of these employee benefits can be provided on a tax-free basis if paid for directly by the church employer. The following list in-

cludes the type of basic employee benefits that should be provided in a well-balanced compensation plan:

- Social Security
- Tax-sheltered Annuity
- Health Insurance
- Dental Insurance
- Group Term Life Insurance
- Long-term Disability Insurance
- Accidental Death and Dismemberment Insurance
- Cash Bonuses
- Paid Holidays
- Vacation

The "cost of a minister" also includes the provision for housing—either a cash housing allowance or a parsonage plus utilities. Most churches provide a parsonage and utilities. Therefore, in most cases, the minister has no discretion as to how that part of compensation will be spent. The minister cannot voluntarily choose to live in a less expensive home and thereby free up income to cover other personal needs. Also, the minister cannot build equity for retirement housing. The church board should recognize that when the minister leaves the church, a significant portion of the compensation that has been "paid" is

that many church boards consider when determining their minister's cash salary are the following: the job requirements, the individual's professional qualifications, educational background, personal experience and expertise, the socioeconomic factors affecting the pay scale in the local community, and such subjective factors as merit pay for a job well done. Cost-of-living adjustments should be considered in each annual salary review of all church employees.

### Structuring Ministerial Compensation

Ministers and churches are realizing the need to differentiate between the "cost of having a ministry" and the "cost of compensating a minister." More and more churches are recognizing that their "package" approach does not provide nearly as much true cash salary as they had thought. They are making efforts to reimburse above the "package" amount for business and professional expenses.

Other churches are financially unable to increase above the amount committed to their "package." How-

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## More and more churches are recognizing that their "package" approach does not provide nearly as much true cash as they had thought.

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ever, they can still help the minister by differentiating between these two kinds of costs and by allowing the minister to recategorize the total amount provided by the church into these two distinct expense categories. The result of this restructuring costs the church no additional funds but does provide a legitimate opportunity for the minister to reduce the potential impact of taxes. ■

The remaining item in the "cost of a minister" is the cash salary. This is the amount that the minister and family use to meet living expenses and over which they have some discretion in spending. Among the factors

left behind in the form of the parsonage. Fortunately, many churches are now recognizing their obligation to assist the minister in preparing for retirement housing by depositing monthly amounts into the minister's Tax-sheltered Annuity account on a tax-advantaged basis. This is an essential part of the compensation package.

The information contained in this article is of a general nature. It is not offered as specific legal or tax "advice." Each person, local church board, and district should evaluate their own unique situation in consultation with their own local legal and tax advisers.



## The Hang-up of Security

by Raymond C. Kratzer

Yakima, Wash.

**T**he minister occupies a unique place in God's economy. His responsibilities as a shepherd, teacher, and instrument through which God conveys His message to mankind set him apart.

The role he is designed to fill includes some disciplines that may vary from what is expected of laymen. Although he has normal inclinations, he must sublimate them for the greater good. Areas of life that evoke great concern for the nonordained must be committed to God's providences and not be sought after by the preacher. This is not to assume that he is unfeeling.

For example, it would be unethical for a pastor to covet place or position. He is often falsely accused of seeking advancement when he accepts a larger place of responsibility. He may be chosen for his success in a smaller assignment. Usually, if you could uncover his hidden drives, you will find that his success was due to his diligence in his present task. He never thought of it as a "stepping-stone" for a better place. He believes that wherever he is, if he is in the center of God's will, he is at the top! And there is no promotion, when this is his philosophy of life.

On the other hand, we admire a layman who sets his heart on a distant coveted goal and makes each success a launching pad by which he is catapulted higher and higher. His desire "to be" is inborn, and his diligence to advance is not unchristian or wrong.

A pastor in areas of greater responsibility and esteem finds a warm glow of gratitude in his heart because of

these tender mercies. He may feel most unworthy, and usually very inadequate, but his consecration to God's will and callings assure him of divine support and enablement. But he dare not allow these bonus moments to become his major motivation. This would be a hang-up that would alter the flow of God's grace in his life.

Related to this paradox is the problem of security for the pastor in the areas of material needs.

The price for discipleship in following Jesus is the same today as always. The man in the Bible who came to Jesus desiring to follow Him was given the wages he might expect. Jesus told him: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20, KJV). With this revelation, the man turned away and failed to "sign up."

The rich young ruler who came running to Jesus had never been so attracted to anyone as to the Master. Suddenly he lost his enthusiasm for the Way. Why? Jesus told him to give his money away, his hang-up of security. At this he turned away sorrowful, for he was tied to material things.



We pastors today are the inheritors of a breed of disciples who counted not their lives dear but who left *everything* to follow Jesus and propagate His gospel. In the early days of the Church, the going was rough. Survival meant almost taking the vow of poverty. As time went on and churches became established, patterns were developed for the care of ministers. General Superintendent Paul, in one of his letters, wrote: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward" (1 Tim. 5:17-18, KJV).

However, Paul exemplified a disdain of material resources or an expectation of an overabundant support by the church. He bent over backward at this point to mark well this dangerous "hang-up of security" that lurks in the path of every preacher.

We praise God for our wonderful laymen who joyously and sacrificially support us. Most of them are aware of the blessing that accrues to a church when they are generous to their pastor.

As a district superintendent I spent many prayerful, burdened hours wrestling with the problem of the security of the minister. The small support in many cases has resulted in neglected dental work, lack of some of the necessities of life, and an undue concern with material needs to the inhibiting of spiritual accomplishment. To find the marginal area where faith and fact meet each other



is most difficult. By personal experience I know that during those invaluable years when our own income was meager, we developed a spiritual strength that could not otherwise have been effected. Miracles happened as God's ravens came to our home to supply each pressing need.

On the other hand, I have seen young men placed in lush positions in their first pastorate that spoiled them and denied to them the miraculous environment where faith and trust are born.

The increasing emphasis upon security for the minister is not all bad. It has been neglected too long. But there are dangers in correlating the material with the spiritual as though they were Siamese twins.

Someone said: "If Patrick Henry were alive today, he would not be shouting, 'Give me liberty or give me death.' He would be trumpeting, 'Give me security or give me death!'"

We dare not allow the hang-up of security to overwhelm us. If it does, it will affect our preaching on faith, on God's care, and on His providential circumstances.



Pastors are the inheritors of a breed of disciples who left everything to follow Jesus.



I recall a young man about to have an apparent nervous breakdown. He was 27 years of age at the time. He was concerned over what would happen to him when he was 70 years of age. How tragic to get hung up so young on this bramble of anxiety and

forget the promises of God. David said: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25, KJV).



Miracles happened as God's ravens came to our home to supply pressing needs.



Without doubt unnecessary hardships have come to God's servants through the years. Not that God was remiss in His care, but somewhere His nudgings fell on those who could have bridged the gap but were preoccupied and unaware of the important place they held in His providential circumstances.

In all these exigencies, let us not forget the promise of God. When we are tempted to fear the tomorrows and find ourselves caught in the hang-up of security, let us disdain this deterrent. Let us rejoice in our great Zion and its constant improvement in the care of God's servants. But, most of all, may we never count God out in His superintendence of our lives. If we are diligent to take care of His interests in our productive years, we need never fear but that He will take care of our interests when our needs arise.

An old man was asked one day if he was ever afraid. He replied: "No, sir! When I see danger coming my way, I just look up and say: 'Father, Your property is in danger; take care of it!' And He always does." ■

# Renewal

by Blair F. Rorabaugh

Uniontown, Ohio

**B**eavers can travel long distances under ice. When they use the oxygen in their lungs, they go up near the ice and let the air out of their lungs. The bubble of air is refreshed, and the beaver takes the same air into its lungs again.

In the winter, Indians caught beaver by scaring them away from their bubbles. Each time the beaver would come back for its air, they would pound on the ice and scare the beaver. When the beaver drowned because it was afraid to come back for its bubble, it would float to the surface, and the Indian would break the ice and remove it from the water.

The worship service is an opportunity to renew our spirit (breath). The devil would drive us away with other activities, carelessness, or differences in the church. If we realized the importance of worship to our spirit, would we make a greater effort to renew our spiritual breath? ■

# Confessions of a "Quaint Saint"

I read with interest the "Confessions of a Born-Again Baby Boomer," by Mike MacNeil, in the December/January/February 1991-92 issue of the *Preacher's Magazine*. Ouch! What a barrage of artillery fired on us sedentary saints. Startled, I dove for cover (the inside front) to check from whence came this sudden bombardment. Incredible—it was friendly fire! It was evident this boomer had located the enemy, and the "enemy is us!" (Namely, the 50 and over crowd.) Look, I'm edgy, and willing to throw in a confession or two of my own.

For starters, I honestly didn't realize that my love for "200-year-old hymns," and my enjoyment of "weird, sanctified circus music" from the venerable organ was culturally offensive to 77 million boomers. Amazing! And how could I have known that I was suffering from "cognitive dissonance"? Nor was I remotely aware that some 375,000 churches in North America, whose membership is comprised mostly of yesterday's leftovers who sing sonorous old hymns accompanied by circus music from sanctified organs, are failing to make Jesus "culturally relevant" to some 77 million baby boomers. I confess to being totally ignorant of that. I just didn't know. . . .

Mike MacNeil has produced a provocative article, and it's brilliantly written. I have been pondering it much of late, trying to respond to the invitation to get to know boomers better. Frankly, I'm flabbergasted! Boomers are "animated by fun, enjoyment, and adventure," but not duty? They "thrive on change, not stability!" They "don't put a lot of trust in institutions, even religious ones." They are "not very denominational." And "most churches are irrelevant" to boomers? Wow!

To the churches, a clarion call has been sounded: "Change your menu, or we'll change our venue." Those of us hooked on "quaint" are asked to "change our packaging." I'm listening, and I'm ready for some change. So what kind of repackaging are we talking? Are we talking "out with organs, old hymns, songbooks, and pulpits," and "in with choruses on overheads, sung to the accompaniment of an assortment of guitars and drums"?

I'm wondering: Is there room for compromise on *both* sides? May we not find common ground upon which we might worship *together*? And if that could be given any positive consideration, couldn't the boomers be willing to make *some* concessions at the bargaining table too? My sense is that there are many congregations where older, more "traditionally conservative" Christians are quietly surrendering their old hymns for overheads. They have bowed to the preferences of younger people and relinquished traditions that were so meaningful to them. Yet they will stay and support the church that has nurtured them. Loyalty isn't really all that bad—ask any pastor who is trying to walk the fine line between opposite views.

When Lord Nelson, the great British admiral, came on the bridge of his ship one day and found two of his officers arguing, he pointed toward the Spanish fleet beyond them and said, "Gentlemen, the enemy is out there."

Surely our enemy is not to be found in hymnbooks, organs, and such. Are we to believe that getting rid of them will automatically solve our problems?

Moreover, let us not lose sight of churches like Dr. Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral or Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie's First Presbyterian Church or

Dr. W. A. Criswell's First Baptist Church and Dr. Jerry Falwell's Thomas Road Baptist Church or Dr. Charles Swindoll's Evangelical Free Church, to name just a few that are well-known. These outstanding evangelical, soul-winning churches make abundant use of 200-year-old hymns, accompanied by—are you ready for this?—pipe organs!

MacNeil has called attention to a state of spiritual somnolence settling down upon too many of our congregations. Undoubtedly he has touched a raw nerve, for a great host of our churches are characterized in the lines of an old hymn: "Hosannahs languish on our lips, And our devotion dies."

Professor MacNeil, if I may say with utmost respect, is mistaken in supposing that the problem lies in the packaging. I think it lies closer to the truth to say that the problem is much deeper. It is what lies within the packaging—the content—that is at issue here. The bottom line is simply this: Wherever Jesus becomes the hunger as well as the food, people will be fed and needs satisfied. And folk will come to a church with that quality of content.

Let's ask our church leaders to bring together the "born-again boomers" and the "quaint saints" in order to provide a forum for amicable discussion. Certainly it is "a consumption devoutly to be wished." Meanwhile, I'm hiding out in the hinterlands of New Brunswick, not far from the habitat of Professor MacNeil. I hope he doesn't come gunning for me. I'm getting older and slow on the draw. Besides, I'm unarmed! In the interests of safety, I will not disclose my real name.

Tremblingly,

Stillman X

# A New Theory of Church Growth

by Alan Nelson  
*Mission Viejo, Calif.*

**R**ecent trends toward big churches have created a large number of church growth experts, some self-proclaimed and others exalted by publishers and other institutions. The fact has produced what seems to be a glut of church growth ideas—if the number of seminar brochures and advertisements is any indication. I like what I see happening in this evolution regarding church growth. More and more people are advocating prayer, spirituality, and worship besides marketing techniques, small-group programs, and leadership concepts. Although the latter is valid, the former tends to be more biblical.

For the sincere minister trying to find firm ground in this quagmire of ideas, pastoring can be frustrating. Simplistic formulas, cookbook recipes, and reductionistic concepts often do a disservice to earnest professionals striving to expand God's kingdom. For example, leadership studies have evolved from the Great Man Theory, to trait theories, toward situational leadership formulas, to today's complexity theories, which acknowledge the diverse influences in a leadership situation. To reduce the complex leadership process to a matter of temperaments and "doings" can create havoc to the goal. Many pastors become disillusioned by their lack of growth, in spite of their bookcases brimming with church growth seminar binders and tapes. Planting a church in Orange County, California, a smorgasbord of mega-ministries, I know all the temptations of simplistic and contrasting solutions.

Many pastors leading church growth seminars and overseeing growing churches fail to recognize that many of their activities do not ac-

tually cause the growth. We tend to create logical, intentional rationale supporting our growth. However, descriptive patterns should not automatically become prescriptive behaviors. Just because church "X" does tele-marketing or seeker-friendly services or a prayer emphasis, it should not be assumed that these items caused the growth. Many of these ministries would have been "successful" even without these intentionally smart tactics. Causal factors can often be elusive, almost chemical-like in nature. I followed several popular growth theories and ideas at the start of our church planting (i.e., mass mailing, giant newspaper advertisements, feature days, contemporary worship, "how-to" preaching for boomers, tele-marketing, etc.). Some of them flopped. Some of them provided marginal success. Barna was right when he said there is no one model for church growth. Every situation is different.

What seems to be missing from the church growth movement literature is a deeper analysis on why churches grow. Some churches with great programming and leadership and marketing grow. Many do not. Even Moses, Joshua, and Caleb could not get the children of Israel into the Promised Land the first time. Some churches with marginal pastoral gifts, facilities, and limited programs explode. Others do not. We need a new theory of church growth that better fits these conflicting case studies. It might prevent a host of talented, hardworking, spiritual pastors from dredging the bottoms of their emotional reservoirs looking for the missing key to ministry expansion.

The new theory builds on sociological, not theological or programmatic

issues. All social organizations—churches, clubs, fraternal movements, etc.—that grow do so primarily because of a chemistry that comes together and "happens." This combustible effect attracts people to the organization or program so that a social movement is spurred. This social movement may or may not be God-sparked, even though ministry may be evident during and as a result of growth.

We need to move away from the idea that whatever God blesses will demonstrate "success." Biblical examples show that this is not always the case. This does not suggest that God sponsors flops, only that we have intentionally or unintentionally pushed success into a tight, little box. Rain falls on the just and the unjust. Job's friends condemned his "failure" because he was not right with God. Yet God later condemned the unholy "holy" advice from his well-intentioned consultants. When the rich man came to Jesus offering to follow Him, everyone in his culture perceived that his success came from God's anointing on his life. Jesus knew God did not really have this man's heart. The man left forlorn.

Social movements remain much too complex to explain in simple books, cassette tapes, and seminars. Realistically these resources tend to be more descriptive than prescriptive. Multiple elements and influences are involved. The leader exists as a part of the leadership process, but only a part. Elements such as timing, structure, resources, personalities, location, and followers all serve as pieces making up the process called leadership. The concept of leadership as a single, dominant personality leading the pack falters as a rather primi-

tive concept in leadership theories. This does not deny the often important role of a key person in the leadership process, but it is a far too simplistic explanation for social movement.

Making certain church growth ideas fundamental for effective ministry denies the reality that these things sometimes are but sometimes are not involved in dynamic situations. Why does the Mormon church grow so rapidly? Do Mormons understand church growth techniques? Their services are incredibly boring. Why do certain fads arise often with little intentional marketing strategies? Conversely, massive monies and marketing magic have gone into projects that have failed miserably. Why? Why would 900 people follow Jim Jones to Guyana and participate in a mass suicide? Why do casinos, brothels, and other unwholesome entities attract so many followers? Is it sin? All sinful institutions do not flourish. Many casinos collapse economically. Spirituality does not always become the key to all numerical growth. Likewise, spiritual gifts, talents, and temperaments do not transfer from leader to leader. It is far too simplistic to say that if you follow steps one, two, and three, your ministry will excel. One of the greatest human drives is the desire to control and manipulate our environment. It seems to be so in the church realm. But God tells us that we cannot do that.

Growth factors can often be elusive, almost chemical-like in nature.

If church growth is predominately a social phenomena, what role does God have in growing churches? By explaining church growth in terms of social movements, I am not deleting the possibility of the Holy Spirit as the chief cause of that chemistry.

God refuses to be bottled, explained, or figured out. His processes avoid the "cookbook" approach. He seems to come and go with little rhyme or reason. He is God. It is His prerogative.

For every glowing biography we read or example of which we hear, dozens of persons lived similar lives and applied similar principles with only moderate results. We lose sight of the sovereignty of God in all this rush for greatness. Sovereignty means God transcends human logic, and His ways are not reducible to set patterns or behaviors. God's sovereignty also means you cannot assume that He always rewards more talent, or better resources, or even greater spiritual purity with visible blessings. His sovereignty keeps us hopping, hoping, and faithful. That fact frustrates those of us who are prone to adopt more manipulative theories.

This social phenomenon does not imply that prayer, repentance, and heart allegiance are not involved in the process of the Holy Spirit's anointing. But they do not always result in an outpouring of God's Spirit. They are sufficient as ends in themselves, even if revival in church growth does not transpire.

Sometimes marketing, timing, leadership experience, and wisdom serve as catalysts for church growth. Pastoring, therefore, becomes merely smart marketing of life-changing truth, and the resulting growth emanates from managerial modality versus spiritual. At other times, a church blossoms by a special touch of God's presence. In still other times, the key elements may be something else. If you are the first church in a new area, or there is a church split down the road, or you have a new idea in an old idea arena, growth often occurs much easier for you than for others with equal giftedness. Obviously, God has gifted some people with the ability to cause growth to take place in various situations. But it becomes counterproductive to reduce the complex nature of social movement into a few predictable tactics and behaviors.

Seeing church growth in terms of social movement, we have a new appreciation for effectiveness. We understand it better. Those who do not experience the same growth, even while applying similar strategies, are

not so frustrated for their lack of growth. The chemical balance is difficult to figure out. It may be just a minute element that makes the thing explode. But without that element, your ministry will go on while you wonder what else is needed. One molecule of oxygen turns harmless carbon dioxide into dangerous carbon monoxide. One degree turns water into powerful steam. A pinch of salt can make or break a chocolate cake.

Leadership as a single, dominant personality leading the pack falters as a primitive leadership theory.

Once the social momentum has begun, it becomes difficult to stop. This is not because of incredible leadership, but because social movements have an energy. Physics tells us that an object in motion tends to stay in motion. Moving objects do not need leaders. They need managers and administrators. Leadership is really only needed during times of significant change and for procuring vision. This explains why many churches and ministries appear in great health, while the moral and spiritual life of the leader may be ebbing. Too often the leader takes credit for results that would have transpired with or without him or her, once this momentum begins. Social movements tend to have life spans. Most churches hitting the top 40 list today will be only memories in a few years. Perhaps it is God's way to keep us all humble and hopeful.

This social movement theory is not

intended to insult those men and women whom God is using in significant ways by making their ideas and gifts appear insignificant. However, it is intended to be a speed bump to slow down purveyors of the idea that by doing steps one, two, and three, you too can be a star and have a burgeoning ministry. This is a humbling thought to those who are tempted to believe in their own giftedness and take credit where it is not warranted.

"I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all" (Eccles. 9:11). If those were my words, someone would label me anti-intellectual for promoting such an idea that all success cannot be calculated and manipulated. These words encourage those who have struggled to implement many of these logical and theologically proper principles for ministry but have not seen the expected results. Many of these people silently mull over their frustrations year after year without admitting it to others. This is not necessarily a sign that God has not called you or that you are delinquent in obeying Him or that you have settled for mediocrity.

Social movements, small or large, are complex and delicate. Church numerical growth may be a social movement, whether prompted by the Holy Spirit, or keen marketing, or need-filling ministries, or leadership giftedness, or something else. Social movements are very difficult to consistently manipulate. Realizing this fact can make a big difference down the road in clergy burnout and moral failure by thinking too highly of yourself if you experience success. It can also avoid bitterness, cynicism, and dropouts by thinking too lowly of yourself. This is not the final word in church growth discussion, but it is food for thought. ■

# Vantage Point of Prayer

by Cy Olsen

as told to Elinor Bjornstad

Venezuela

**I** took advantage of two older women. They made a difference in my ministry.

Just out of seminary and in my first pastorate, I prayed for ways to develop my prayer life and apply James 1:5 to my own life: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (KJV). I knew I needed divine wisdom to serve as a pastor to older people in my church. God directed me to Lois and Edna, two women in their late 60s who were wise and prayerful.

Each week I met with them for a time of fellowship around the Scripture. They gave practical insights into how to pray for certain situations. I knew I had their prayer support in each phase of my ministry. While preparing my sermons, I was conscious of their prayers for guidance. In counseling with the church family, their insights and prayers were of infinite value. I could always count on them for ideas concerning promotion, motivation, and programs, drawing on their many years of experience.

When the crush of church activities and the desire to succeed crowded my time and caused me to neglect my family life, Lois and Edna gently reproved, prodded, and guided me.

In general, they functioned as "moms" to me and my wife and beloved "grandmas" to our children.

Our meetings together became times of relaxation, fellowship, and loving acceptance, which I came to cherish. They also kept me accountable to pray regularly. This discipline often gets neglected by young pastors in the crush of new demands and fear of failure. These also became times when we prayed for my own failures in the ministry, as well as for the families of each woman and the missionaries of the church.

While I heartily recommend this method of prayer help to pastors, young and old, individuals should be chosen on the basis of wisdom and depth of prayer ministry, not simply by age.

Last, but not least, I admit I always looked forward to their home-made goodies and the good Norwegian coffee. ■





# Today's Books for Today's Preachers



## **HOMILETICAL HANDBOOK**

by Donald L. Hamilton

(Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992)

PA080-541-6269, \$14.95

Donald L. Hamilton, professor of preaching at Columbia Seminary in South Carolina, has written an evenly balanced text on preaching. He distinguishes the importance of preaching as compared to just speaking. He provides a strong rationale for good sermon structure. In part two, pages 32-104, he points out clearly how good homiletical techniques serve one well as he preaches God's sacred Word. Some of the techniques are expressed in various approaches, such as keyword, analytical, textual, problem solving, narrative, and others.

In part three Hamilton suggests that ministers should use their great homiletical treasury. This "treasury" includes our early history of preaching, Old Testament history, biblical poetry, wisdom literature, prophetic preaching, New Testament history, Jesus' varied preaching methods and His teachings, miracle passages, parables, and preaching from the letters of the New Testament.

A significant amount of endnotes and other relevant materials are a vital part of each of the 22 chapters. The 7½ page biography includes the references in four sections: (1) The Preacher and Preaching; (2) Theological and Exegetical Perspectives; (3) Communication Theory; and (4) The History of Preaching.

Ministers, busy in their work, will find this *Handbook* just what one would expect from a good handbook—quality materials found quickly and produced in an easy-to-grasp way, and assimilated into selected sermon preparation. Obtain a copy and keep it handy in your office or study.

You will appreciate the scholarship and the wealth of material.

—Montford L. Neal  
Bristow, Okla.

## **THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON**

by Henri J. M. Nouwen

(New York: Doubleday, 1992)

PA038-541-8671, \$25.00

Henri Nouwen resigned from Harvard Divinity School in 1985 and joined L'Arche in Toronto, where he now serves as pastor and chaplain. L'Arche, a community for the mentally retarded, was founded in 1964 by Canadian Jean Vanier and has grown to 90 communities throughout the world. The Toronto community is known as Daybreak.

As Nouwen explains in his prologue: "A seemingly insignificant encounter with a poster presenting a detail of Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son* set in motion a long spiritual adventure that brought me to a new understanding of my vocation and offered me new strength to live it."

Nouwen wrote the book after he spent two days observing and listening to comments by tour guides and members at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia, where the painting, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, is on permanent display. He had previously studied reproductions of the painting. Henri Nouwen comments, "Everything comes together here: Rembrandt's story, humanity's story, and God's story."

Nouwen places himself, and asks readers to place themselves, in the role of the prodigal (or returning) son, then in the role of the brother (or elder son), and, then, in the role of the father.

Born in the Netherlands, Nouwen

has taught pastoral theology at Notre Dame and Yale, as well as Harvard. He is highly regarded, internationally, for works such as *Creative Ministry* and *The Way of the Heart*, his book on prayer.

*The Return of the Prodigal Son* is an excellent book; inspiring and spiritually uplifting.

—Jerry Armstrong  
Nashville

## **PROMOTION STRATEGIES FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH**

by Wayne Kiser

(Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992)

PA080-541-6234, \$7.95

Wayne Kiser's book, *Promotion Strategies for the Local Church*, attempts to cover a much-neglected subject in church administration. The author is well qualified to speak on local church promotion. He teaches a course in the subject at Moody Bible Institute. Since he serves as an active professor, the reader has to work through the "classroom style" of his writing. It tends to make the book a bit pedantic. However, this book has a lot of "food for thought and use."

The author's work on ethics in promotion especially impressed me. He clearly delineates five rules for ethical promotion that will help to keep churches honest and credible.

Kiser's communication on church newsletters needs to be made available to all local churches. Many church newsletters fail to adequately promote the local church and often get filled with irrelevant material. Mr. Kiser shows how to make the church's newsletter reader-friendly.

The author's illumination on writing a good news release and working

(Continued on page 52)

# Stories Preachers Tell Each Other



## Watch Out for Wedding Woes

by Margaret G. Bigger

Charlotte, N.C.

**N**o matter how experienced you are at performing weddings, you just might learn something from other ministers' pitfalls.

While collecting odd-but-true wedding tales for my book, *There's No Such Thing as a Perfect Wedding* (Down Home Press, 1991), I interviewed clergymen of many denominations. From them, I have gathered a few tips:

### Rehearse the Service Ahead of Time

So you've done this ceremony scores of times. It would still be wise to glance over the wording once more before the service. Then you'll be less likely to say, as one minister did, "Do you take this man to be your lawful wedded wife?" Or "Who gives this man to marry this woman?"

In that situation, the father of the bride responded, "His mother and I do."

Perhaps you've heard the joke that is being passed around clergy circles about the minister who, instead of "lawfully joined," said, "you are joyfully loined."



Well, one pastor thought that was hilarious. But at his next wedding, he inadvertently said it for real.

### Rehearse Again

The United Methodist minister had been asked to share a service with a friend of the bride and groom.

"What do you generally like to do at a wedding?" he asked the fellow on the phone.

"I generally watch," replied the man. The couple had neglected to say that he was a college professor with no ministerial credentials.

The Methodist minister was relieved to learn that he was a Presbyterian elder, who could conduct portions of the ceremony. They agreed on their parts, but it was obvious that the elder was very apprehensive about his role.

At the wedding, the layman, still nervous and uneasy, followed the wedding book quite well and snapped it shut. He bowed his head with the congregation for the prayer. Silence.

The minister tapped the elder's arm. "The book!" he whispered. "Open the book!" Although he had performed at least a hundred weddings, when the book snapped shut, the minister's mind did too.

### Check Those Names

One pastor realized, too late, that he had written the name of his summer intern in place of the groom's in the wedding book. Not only was it indelible in the couple's book, but the minister had asked the bride if she

would take the intern in holy matrimony. And she had agreed!

Another one led the bride to say, "I, Thomas, take thee, Peggy . . ."

An 82-year-old minister called the bride by five different names. All were wrong.

### Never Try to Play Two Parts

An experienced preacher chose to serve both the function of father-of-the-bride and of pastor at his own daughter's nuptials. Not only would he switch places back and forth, but he had planned to say a more elaborate speech than "her mother and I do." But when the father's turn came on the other side of the wedding book, he choked, unable to speak.

### Keep an Extra Robe Handy

While the soloist was singing "The Lord's Prayer," the minister watched helplessly as the groom reeled, retched, and then spewed. Vomit sprayed and ran all down the minister's robe and dripped at his feet. Meanwhile, the musician was singing of deliverance from evil. Needless to say, that minister skipped the reception.

In the early '70s, a bride planned a backyard wedding. During premarital counseling, the preacher asked if she had alternate plans in case it rained. She did not and would not make any. She should have. Just before the ceremony, it began to pour. Her house was like a sardine can packed with guests with no place to sit, but she was determined to delay the service until it could be held outside.

Indeed, the sun eventually did lighten the backyard and the spirits, and out people went to dry off everything. But surprise! More sprinkles. Only the bride ignored them. Guests hung back under the eaves of the house or beneath umbrellas in the back-ground, while the mothers were seated in their appropriate chairs, and the wedding party took their places. The bride refused to stand beneath a golf umbrella offered by the preacher. That was more than frustrating for him, for his robe had velvet trim, which would be ruined. He left off the robe and married them in his new suit, which, incidentally, was never the same after that.

As he went through the service from the wedding book, there would be periodic pauses so that he could peel the wet pages apart. Yet, despite his unpleasant feelings while soaking in the rain, he could hardly keep a straight face when glancing at the mother of the groom. Her highly teased "beehive" hairdo was drooping down and down into a helmet around her head.

### Carry Smelling Salts

In the 1930s, a groom fainted repeatedly during the service. When revived the third time, he ran out—never to return. Friends said he was too much of a gentleman to admit he didn't want to marry the girl who had suddenly become infatuated with him.

Several decades later, a Georgia bridegroom fainted, and only his best man and bride knew it. Anticipating the possibility, the best man had positioned himself behind his friend to hold him up. He even answered the vows on the groom's behalf. The minister never noticed. When the groom awoke, he was nearly married.

A recent bride whispered, halfway through the service, "Preacher, I think I'm going to faint."

"No, you're not," he replied in a low voice. "Just bend your knees and take some deep breaths."

She obeyed but grew whiter. "Preacher, I'm going to throw up."

"Faint!" he barked.

### Beware of Ring Bearers

He signaled to his mother that he had to go to the bathroom. While she



took him out of the sanctuary, the two flower girls fought over who would hold the ring bearer's pillow. They noisily tugged and tossed, but the bride and groom were oblivious to it all. No parent stepped up to stop the fight. The preacher raised his voice over the din and continued. Only when the ring bearer retrieved "his" property did the tussling end.

Another ring bearer leaned down and peered up the minister's robe. His mother watched with horror. She motioned for him to get up. He ignored her and changed positions to get a better view. Feet in the air, he appeared on the other side, still looking up the robe.

By then, the child's father, a groomsman, had seen enough. He left the lineup and strode toward his son. By that time, the boy was crouched, feet on the floor, head down, still gazing at the minister's legs. Dad snatched his belt and carried him in the same bent position out a side door. The kid did not howl, only grinned.

The minister never missed a beat but was undoubtedly uncomfortable. Because of the heat of the day, he had worn only underwear beneath his heavy robe.

### Stick a Screwdriver, Knife, Bug Spray, and Fire Extinguisher in Your Back Pocket

The best man bumbled and fumbled. The ring dropped. The chancel floor was slanted, and it rolled—bling, bling, bling—with two ushers,

the groom, and a man from the audience chasing it. Bling, bling—it hit a cold air return. Brrat-a-tat, brrat, brrat, brrat-a-tat. All four men were on all fours like crawling babies, watching the grate, listening—brrat, brat, brrat-a-tat—as the ring dropped all the way to the furnace.

Like he'd been told, the preacher pulled the end of the tiny ribbon bow, so that he could slip the wedding bands off the ring bearer's pillow. But someone had made a bow atop a square knot. His gentle tug tightened the knot. Hard as he tried, the preacher could not release those rings. He jerked. He pulled. He picked at it. On the

third row, a woman noticed his dilemma. She walked up to the front, drew a pair of scissors out of her pocketbook, and cut the ribbon.

At a large church wedding, a tremendous spider crawled out of the flowers, crossed the floor, and disappeared under the hem of the maid of honor's dress. Not one soul did anything about it except watch, ignoring the service itself until the giant arachnid reappeared and started up the back of the bride's train. Undoubtedly, a few were holding their breaths by then. At last, the maid of honor spied it and flicked it away.

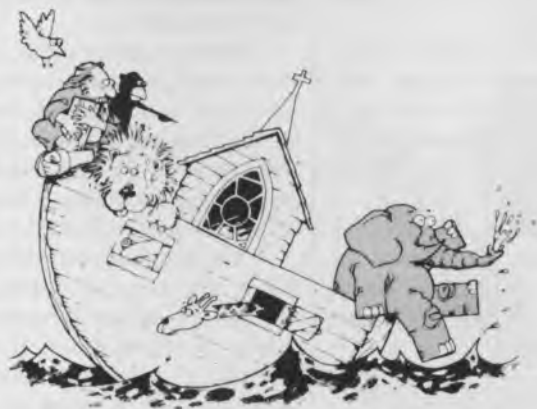
Two preachers—one young and one retired—were officiating at a night wedding in a large rural church. The younger one finished his part and passed the book over to his counterpart.

As the retired preacher was adjusting the book so that he could read it with his older eyes, he got it too close to the candelabra. The corner of the book caught fire! He fumbled to put it out. No luck. The quick-moving groom snuffed it out with his hand, leaving the groom with a smoked palm and the bride with a scorched wedding book.

### Keep a Sense of Humor

When something like this happens to you, pass on the story so that others may have a little chuckle in their lives too. ■

Excerpts from *There's No Such Thing as a Perfect Wedding*, by Margaret G. Bigger (Down Home Press, 1991).



## The Great Doughnut Debate

**I**t's just so messy and too much work for too few people. I say we stop serving doughnuts," said the head usher.

Opposing the antidoughnut ushers were those who complained, "Not enough chance for fellowship as it is."

Someone interrupted the usher, saying, "I'm tired of complaints. It's just doughnuts."

A prodoughnut person declared fervently, "I think the future of our visitation program could rest on this issue of doughnuts. First Community serves doughnuts, and they're only a few blocks away."

Twenty minutes later, one woman said, "Wouldn't it be great if we could get this excited about new Bibles for the children?"

A prodoughnut person jumped to his feet, inhaling sharply. "I resent the attitude of this board!" he said. Then, "Pastor, you've been silent. What do you think?"

"Al, you know I'm not a voting member of the church board. I'm here strictly to answer questions and offer guidance."

"This isn't a pastoral issue," someone chimed in.

"I want to know where he stands, that's all. Good grief, the man must have an opinion."

As they went at each other, I watched my pastor doodling on a tablet. Even upside down I could make out the words: "Let them eat cake."

It's difficult to view ourselves as cynical. In Greek, cynic means "man-hater." Not a pretty picture, and not very Christlike either. Yet all the pastors I know admit "cynical" feelings from time to time.

### Are you singing "Me and My Shadow"?

One pastor recounted the months after arriving at a new church. "It seems like I had very little help at the church. I became cynical, to say the least. Where were people when I needed help? Even the office help didn't show up on time most mornings."

At one point, he discovered two weddings in the church scheduled for the same day, only an hour apart.

"I thought, This is it. Invitations were out for both weddings. My ministry flashed before my eyes. I imagined people exiting the church in droves."

That's when the veteran pastor from next door, who heard his new neighbor mention the problem at a ministers' breakfast, offered a solution—his sanctuary. Of course, it wasn't an ideal solution.

"But I knew I had a friend, someone without selfish motives," the pastor recalls.

### How do you spell ATTITUDE?

When we took the pastorate of a small church, my husband asked me to handle the Education Department. I reluctantly agreed. After my first meeting with teachers, the young adult teacher approached me, holding a pile of curriculum. He smiled.

"What do you think of these?" he asked, extending the materials toward me.

"Is there a problem?" I asked.

He dropped the pile. It landed with a whoosh, scattering. Next he dropped the teacher's book across the room.

I took a deep breath and decided to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Maybe a vicious New Ager had sneaked into the Curriculum Department?

"Wow, what's in that stuff?"

"It's just too confining," he snorted. "It doesn't mean a thing to me. I want to teach the Bible—my way, as God leads me!"

As he stomped past, I spun on my heel and called after him, "You get back here and clean up your mess. You're just a baby! What would your mother think?" Deeply offended, he took his family—and his mother—to another church.

After that, I didn't like church members. A few weeks later I heard a teen whisper to her friend, "How do you spell *attitude*? P-A-S-T-O-R-S-W-I-F-E." It was time for an attitude check. Cynicism and anger creep in slowly.

### So, what's your point?

Stick to the point. If the point is doughnuts, talk about doughnuts, not how "lazy the ushers are anyway, and God knows it wouldn't hurt them to mop the hallway; most of them are portly." (Overheard from one prodoughnut individual.)

That's what my pastor did. He led us into discussion about the benefits of doughnuts versus the drawbacks. Anytime we glared at one another or even looked as if we were about to get off the subject, he reminded us of "the point."

Besides resolving the issue, his determination to keep us focused kept reinforcing that we were adults, sitting around a conference table in ties and panty hose debating doughnuts.

### Mirror, mirror on the wall, could that be? In me? A flaw?

One pastor recounts walking toward a young woman and her small

son. They looked familiar; he remembered seeing them in church a few times. He smiled widely as they got closer. Suddenly, the little boy tugged on his mother's coat and pointed at the pastor, saying with appropriate awe, "Look, Mommy, it's God!"

When you bask in the glow of thriving programs, stirring sermons, and filled altars, enjoy it without letting pride seep into your spirit. We lean toward cynicism when we forget our own annoying, strange flaws.

**He who laughs last probably didn't get the joke.**

Author Barbara Johnson founded

Spatula Ministries, an organization that supports troubled parents and parents of homosexuals.

In a group setting, a father mentioned lunch plans with his son. But, his son was medically becoming a daughter and would be dressed like a woman. What should he do? Silence fell on the room.

"I decided somebody had to say something; so, to lighten up the situation, I suggested, 'Maybe you could wear your wife's clothes and your son would feel more comfortable.'

"There was a moment of stunned silence. Then somebody started to laugh, and pretty soon we were all

laughing, including the father . . . there is no good or practical advice in such a situation."

I know a pastor who had a poster of a very frenzied looking person with his hair on end, his eyes reddened, his teeth clenched. Beneath this image were the words, "When I got up this morning, I had one nerve left. Now you're getting on it."

What does one do, when surrounded by the Great Doughnut Debate? He smiles, opens his arms in acceptance, reminds himself of personal occasions of silliness, and prays that someone will adjourn the meeting—soon. Before that last nerve snaps. ■

**On Using the Hymnal** (Continued from page 29)

life of the medieval monasteries is bequeathed to us in the hymns of men like Bernard of Clairvaux; the age of the Puritans is revived in the stately melody of Milton. And, in the same way, the movement that brought new life to the world in the eighteenth century stands crystallized in the throbbing verse of Charles Wesley.

(A Late Lark Singing)

This is not a time to throw out the old but rather to acclimate youth and new Christians to the rarefied spiritual altitude our forefathers enjoyed and embraced. It is the responsibility of the pastoral team to teach people to understand as well as to sing the grand hymns of the faith, the songs of Zion.

Hymns used in congregational worship can help prepare us emotionally and mentally for the ministry of the

Holy Spirit in us and through us. They should be sung thoughtfully, reminding us of our respect due to Almighty God and expressing that to Him. The assembled Church is never more glorious than when it exalts the risen Savior in terms worthy of His majestic nature and character. Our hymns must burst forth in opulent splendor once more on congregations intent on genuinely worshipping Deity. ■

**Today's Books for Today's Preachers** (Continued from page 48)

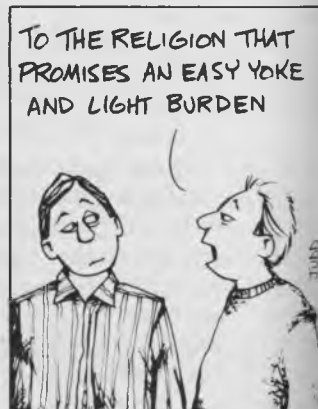
with editors provides excellent tools for accomplishment. His chapter on design is especially helpful. He states, "Good design never draws attention to itself, but it summarizes and enhances what the writer has to say. The person who receives your church's brochure, for example, should grasp the feel of your church without reading a word of the text."

Professor Kiser brings in the importance of "ministry" in good promotion. He says it best: "Ask the Spirit of God to expose you to the training available in your town, give you wisdom and understanding to evaluate the work of others, and if need be, give you a stable of volunteers and professionals to help your church publications glorify Him."

This book by Kiser needs to be placed on the reference shelf of every pastor so that it can be referred to again and again, guiding the pastor to meaningful and successful promotion. Healthy churches feel good about themselves and pass that feeling on through their promotions.

—Joe Farrow  
Spokane, Wash.

**BEYOND BELIEF**







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**WORSHIP**

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**&**

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**PREACHING**

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**HELPS**

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David W. Graves

## June/July/August 1993

Prepared by David W. Graves

### INTRODUCTION

#### *The Names of God*

Who is God and how can we know Him? How can we know Him, unless He chooses to reveal himself to us? How has God revealed himself to man? In this series of sermons, "The Names of God," I endeavor to call attention to the names under which God has revealed himself to man throughout the Old Testament.

The names reveal some of God's distinct attributes and characteristics or His relation to certain things or persons. Realizing that one name cannot fully express the nature of God, He revealed himself through many different names. He has revealed himself to man, here a little, and there a little. And yet each different name contains, hidden in itself, something of the special virtues that the other names bring out more separately.

The preaching of these materials is very rewarding and enjoyable. In the narrative form, they lend themselves to creative and captivating preaching. Many of the stories will be familiar to you and your people; however, do not overlook the importance of the timeless truths that are contained in God's names. Use your imagination and creativity, not only in retelling the narrative, but also in making present-day application and interpretation.

The suggested orders of worship are thematic in nature. The hymns, choruses, and special music have been chosen to prepare the congregation for the truth of the message. Many of the songs will speak directly to the particular name about which you will be preaching.

As I studied, God ministered to my heart and life. I grew in my understanding of His nature. This understanding caused a deepening of my love for Him. I felt praise and worship spring from my heart as I came to realize the greatness of my Heavenly Father.

My desire is that in your considering the names under which God has revealed himself, it may help you know Him better. And as we know Him better, may we be made more like Him. He has made us to know and love Him, and to bear His image, so to reveal Him to a world that knows Him not. May our thoughts on these names serve this end, to His glory and our blessing.

# THE NAMES OF GOD

## Jehovah (Yahweh)

by David W. Graves

Exod. 3:4-15

June 6, 1993

### INTRO:

The poet William Shakespeare posed this question: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet."

And most people would agree. Our modern society places little significance on the meaning of a name. Yet, to the Hebrew, names were descriptive and expressed meanings. A person's name was a kind of alter ego. His name embodied his distinctive essence, his character, his personality, and his inner nature. Names were important to the Hebrews.

The names of God in the Bible help us understand who God is and what He is like. His names reveal aspects of His character, His personality, His inner nature, and His relationship to us. His names are important if we are to know Him, love Him, and praise Him. In Exodus 3, we find an important name of God.

What is the name of God?

For centuries, people did not know the name of God. In the beginning, God walked through the Garden with Adam and Eve. It wasn't necessary for them to know His name because they knew Him intimately. They did not need to call upon Him, for He was their daily Companion. Not until Abram was called out of His homeland and traveled to Canaan did God speak to man and give himself a name. "The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward'" (Gen. 15:1). "He also said to him, 'I am the Lord'" (v. 7). "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty'" (17:1). God became known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was not until this point in history that God revealed himself to man in the form of a name.

Now we come to Moses. God chose a name to reveal himself to Moses. God tells Moses who He is: "I Am has sent me to you" (Exod. 3:14). What does that mean to us? The name God used puzzles many. There is no other name like it. The scribes felt it was so sacred they wouldn't say it. They would write it without any vowels. The consonants were YHWH—that's all. Then, in the third century, the scribes placed vowels with YHWH, and it became *Yahweh*. But since the Jews wouldn't say Yahweh, they took the vowels from the Hebrew word for Lord, *Adonai*, and inserted them into the name YHWH to make *Yahovah*, which we pronounce, "Jehovah."

### I. Jehovah Is Translated "The Lord"

It occurs some 6,800 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. What does it mean? It means He is the eternal God—the One who always is (Gen. 21:22, 33), the God who is contemporary. To Moses He was the "I Am," or "I

will be what I will be" (Exod. 3:14, marg.). God told Moses that He was the God who always had been and who always would be. He was the eternal God. No matter what would happen in the world, God would continue to live and reign as God.

Imagine how radical Moses' message to His people must have been! The other nations worshiped perishable gods. Egypt, the most powerful nation, worshiped animals such as monkeys, alligators, cats, even beetles. The Egyptians thought these animals represented the gods of the universe. When one of these animals died, it was given a stately burial. The Egyptians worshiped these things, yet their gods perished.

Now Moses returned to Egypt from the wilderness of the Sinai to tell the Israelites, "I Am has sent me!" The God who has always lived and always would live. The One who had been God would be God forever. He, the great I Am, sent Moses.

There is a message for us today. We serve a God who is contemporary. We live in a day that worships the present, the temporal, the instant this and instant that, disposable this and disposable that—disposable diapers, containers, bottles, contacts, jobs, careers, marriages, families, commitments. People rearrange and discard at their slightest whim. Styles of clothes change. Electronics are out-of-date before you learn how to use them. Everything seems temporal. Yet we have a God who is eternal, yet ever our Contemporary. He is never out-of-date. We can count on Him (Rev. 1:8; Ps. 145:13-17).

### II. Jehovah Is Immutable

We serve a God who never changes. We all change with age. Our hair turns gray or turns loose. Our skin wrinkles and toughens. Our bones get brittle and arthritic. Our relationships change. Yet God never changes.

**ILLUS.** Author Lloyd C. Douglas used to tell how he loved to visit an old man who gave violin lessons because the teacher had a kind of homey wisdom that refreshed him. One morning Douglas walked in and said, "Well, what's the good news today?"

Putting down his violin, the teacher stepped over to a tuning fork suspended from a cord and struck it a smart blow. "There is the good news for today," he said. "That, my friend, is the musical note A. It was A all day yesterday, will be A next week, and for a thousand years" (EOI, 1903, 486).

The good news we have is that not only is the A note unchanging, but also we are serving a God who is never-changing. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is from everlasting to everlasting (Pss. 90:2; 33:6-15; 102:25-27). His love and care for us does not change. His promises are still true: "Call and I will answer; repent and I will forgive; and I will be with you."

### III. Jehovah Is Sovereign

We serve a God who is in control (Ps. 135:5-14; Dan. 4:34-35). He is the sovereign God, and He does what pleases Him. We are not just a people of fate; God is in control of everything in heaven and on earth. Sometimes, in the midst of trials and troubles, we can doubt that God is in control.

**ILLUS.** On the morning of Abraham Lincoln's death, a crowd of 50,000 people gathered before the Exchange Building in New York. Feelings ran high, natural enough in the circumstances, and there was danger of its finding expression in violence. Then a well-built man in officer's uniform stepped to the front of the balcony and, in a voice that rang like a trumpet call, cried:

"Fellow citizens! Clouds and darkness are round about Him. His pavilion is dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies. Justice and judgment are the establishment of His throne. Mercy and truth go before His face. Fellow citizens! God reigns! And the government at Washington still lives!" (EOI, 1906, 486).

Instantly the tumult was stilled, as the people grasped the import of those sublime words. God was in control. And God is still in control of our lives, our world, our future, regardless of our present situation.

And God backs up His sovereignty with His knowledge (all-knowing), power (all-powerful), and presence (all-present).

### IV. Jehovah Is Faithful

We have a God who keeps His covenants. Yahweh above all is a redemptive name. It expresses God's faithfulness to His people. He wants to be in fellowship with us. He wants to care for us, nourish us, protect us, teach us, and love us. God is a God of covenant.

**ILLUS.** An elderly Christian was in much distress as he lay dying. "Oh, Pastor," he said, "for years I have relied upon the promises and faithfulness of God. But now in the hour of death I can't remember a single one to comfort me."

Knowing that Satan was disturbing him, the preacher said, "My brother, do you think God will forget any of His promises?"

A smile came over the face of the dying believer as he exclaimed joyfully, "No, no! He won't! Praise the Lord, now I can fall asleep in Jesus and trust Him to remember them all and bring me safely to heaven." Peace flooded

his soul, because of the assurance of a covenant-keeping God. God is faithful to His promises and to His children (EOI, 2004, 508).

God says: "They will be my people, and I will be their God" (Jer. 32:38; see 37-41 and Heb. 8:8-12).

### CONCLUSION:

Jehovah is the great "I Am." A God who wants to walk in relationship and fellowship with us. God is our Contemporary—He knows where we are, and He knows what we need. God is constant—the promises He gives He will back up. He is in control—a God of covenant. Who is this God? He is the great "I Am." Yahweh!

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Call to Worship	Psalm 148
Invocation	
Chorus	"We Will Glorify"
Hymn	"O Worship the King"
Chorus	"Thou Art Worthy, Great Jehovah"
Pastoral Prayer	
Chorus	"Jehovah to Me"
Choir Special	"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"
Receiving of Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	"He Never Changes"
Sermon	"THE NAMES OF GOD: JEHOVAH (YAHWEH)"
Invitation	
Choral Benediction	"Now unto the King Eternal"

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### *Offertory Sentence*

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14, KJV).

##### *Offertory Prayer*

"O merciful Creator, Your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: make us always thankful for Your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of Your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever" (The Book of Common Prayer).

# THE LORD GOD MOST HIGH

## Jehovah-Elyon

by David W. Graves

Genesis 14:19

June 13, 1993

### INTRO:

In Genesis 12, we learn that God has called Abram. It was a call to leave his country, his people, his father's household, and go with God somewhere. If someone called you on the phone and said to you, "Leave your job; leave your family and friends; leave all your possessions; and go with me somewhere," would you eagerly do it? Can you imagine the faith that Abram had in his God? In verse 4, we learn that Abram left as the Lord had commanded. The Lord made a promise to him: "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (vv. 2-3).

Abram took that promise and the faithfulness of his God, and he left on a journey. In chapter 13, we see that God had blessed Abram and his nephew, Lot, so much that it became necessary for them to separate. Lot, being a shrewd man, chose the best land and went to the plain near Sodom and Gomorrah, while Abram remained in the mountains near Hebron. Lot was going to make a name for himself. But, in chapter 14, something happened to Lot's plan. A war broke out between four kings and the five kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the nearby cities. Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown. Everyone, including Lot, was taken captive.

A man from Sodom who had escaped came to Abram and informed him that Lot had been taken captive. Abram called his mighty army together, all 318 of them, and pursued the four mighty armies. Abram divided his men into two groups, and they routed the enemy. Abram recovered all the goods, all the women and children—all the people, including Lot and his possessions.

Returning from his conquest, Abram was met by Melchizedek, king of Salem and high priest of the Lord God Most High, who blessed Abram, saying: "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand" (vv. 19-20). Melchizedek's blessing introduces us to one of the names of God: "Jehovah-Elyon." Elyon means "supreme God," "Most High God." What did it mean to Abram and what does it mean to us to know that our God is Jehovah-Elyon?

### I. God Is Our Divine Protector

#### *A. Just 318 men against the mightiest armies of that day—amazing!*

The pagan kings believed their gods helped them in battle. If they were defeated, they believed it was because their enemies' god was stronger than their god. Melchizedek knew what he was saying when he called God Elyon, Most High God.

Abram knew his God was his Protector. That's why he faced incredible odds without fear. Throughout the Old Testament, God has been a protector for His people.

**ILLUS.** Moses recognized that God was his Protector. Moses had his Israelites against the whole nation of Egypt. Yet Moses said: "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Exod. 14:13-14).

"I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run" (Exod. 23:27). Why? Because God is our divine Protector!

Hezekiah told the nation of Judah, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles" (2 Chron. 32:7-8).

*B. God's protection is promised to His children who are involved in spiritual warfare.*

There is a war waging against our families, our marriages, our spiritual lives, and against our churches. Paul warned us: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12).

**ILLUS.** Two missionaries in Malaysia walked to a distant village for some money that had been sent to a bank for them. When they were returning to their station, night overtook them. They prayed and committed themselves to God. Then they lay down to sleep on a lonely hillside.

Some weeks later a man came to the mission hospital for treatment. He looked intently at the missionary doctor. "I have seen you before," he said.

"No, I don't think we have met before," said the doctor.

"But we have met before! You were sleeping one night on a hillside. Several of us saw you withdraw some money from the bank. We followed you, intending to rob you when it was dark. But we could not get near you because you were surrounded by soldiers."

"Soldiers!" exclaimed the missionary. "There were no soldiers with us!"

The bandit said, "But there were soldiers with you—16 of them. Their swords were drawn. We were filled with fear and ran away!"

Praise God, we do have a divine Protector. David wrote: "The angel of the Lord encamps around those



who fear him, and he delivers them" (Ps. 34:7). He is our divine Protector.

## II. God Is the Divine Possessor (v. 19)

"Creator (possessor, KJV) of heaven and earth."

*A. Our God not only created everything in this world but also owns it:* "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters" (Ps. 24:1-2). "For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me" (Ezek. 18:4). Is God the Possessor of every one of us? That's what the Word declares. He is the Creator and the Possessor of every living creature. God owns everything! Somewhere along the line we have forgotten that. We think we own ourselves and our possessions.

To whom do you give the credit for your material blessings? To yourself—your own hard work, your own intelligence? To your boss, company, family, luck? Lot's attitude was "make it for yourself." Lot chose the "best" land. He wanted to get the advantage over Abram. He was looking out for "number one." He wanted to be a "self-made man." He wanted to make it for himself. So he settled near Sodom and Gomorrah, but he lost it all because of the moral corruption of the city. He compromised and lost.

*B. We need to take the attitude that Abram took.*

Abram took the attitude that everything was God's and was from God (1 Chron. 29:14). He gave God the credit for the victory and for the material blessings he would receive (v. 20). He knew that God could and would supply whatever he needed.

**ILLUS.** A Christian man had worked for a business concern for more than 25 years. One day his employer said to him, "A young man will report for work today. He will be doing the same kind of work you have been doing. I want you to train him for the work."

The man thought, I have been ill and away from work much during the last year. I will probably be replaced by this younger man whom I have been asked to train. At the close of the day, he went home, dejected and discouraged. He said to his wife, "Jean, my employer has asked me to train a young man for my line of work. I'm afraid that the young man will get my position. Being the president's nephew, he has strong backing!"

"I see," said his wife, "and my husband has only the Lord God of hosts to back him and supply his needs!"

Abram knew that he had Jehovah-Elyon, the God who owns it all, to supply his needs. God blessed him with herds, land, other kinds of wealth. Abram wanted no one to say, "I made Abram what he is today." God alone would receive the credit. And we need to give God the credit for all that we have to enjoy.

## III. God Is the Divine Provider (v. 20)

*A. God is the Provider of our protection, victory, possessions, and our deliverance.*

What do you need deliverance from this morning? An attitude, a habit, a temptation, a problem? Look at the scripture: "And blessed be God Most High, who de-

livered your enemies into your hand" (v. 20). He has already done it. All we have to do is receive that deliverance by faith. God has divine deliverance for you this day, whatever your problem, your habit, your sin. God can and will deliver us!

*B. God promises not only to deliver but also to subdue problems.*

He may not remove cancer, but He wants to deliver you from fear and give victory over it. He may not remove the hateful temper of your spouse, but He will deliver that temper into your hands and give you victory over it. He may not remove cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, and illicit sex out of the world, but He can deliver the temptation into your hands and give you victory over them! You must claim His deliverance from your problems.

God promises to be Jehovah-Elyon in your life.

His Name—Jehovah-Elyon

Divine Protector—we have victory.

Divine Processor—we have blessings.

Divine Provider—we have deliverance.

1. Walter B. Knight, *Knight's Treasury of Illustrations* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), 303

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Responsive Reading	"The Source of Help"
Hymn	"O God Our Help in Ages Past"
Chorus	"I Stand in Awe"
	"Awesome Power"
	"Awesome God"
	"Alleluia"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir	
Reception of Tithes and Offerings	
Offertory Instrumental Special	
Duet	
Sermon	"THE LORD GOD MOST HIGH: JEHOVAH-ELYON"
Invitation Hymn	"He Is Able to Deliver Thee"
Benediction	

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### *Benediction*

"To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen" (Jude 24-25).

#### *Offertory Sentence*

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give'" (Exod. 25:1-2).

#### *Offertory Prayer*

"Eternal God, Heavenly Father, You have given us many things, and many are the things that we can give to You. Help us discover the rich resources of our lives and make them available to You for Your glory. Amen."

# THE ALMIGHTY GOD

El-Shaddai

by David W. Graves

Genesis 17

June 20, 1993

## INTRO:

God appeared to Abraham 13 years after the birth of Ishmael, reminding him that they still had a covenant together. Abraham was 99 when the conversation began (v. 1). It must have been some kind of prayer meeting! Here God reveals another of His names to the man He promised would be the father of many nations. Each name of God had its own particular meaning and reveals to us more about His nature. Notice what happened (vv. 1-3).

## I. God Communicates with Abraham (v. 1)

### A. *God is in control of our lives.*

The name El-Shaddai means "God Almighty." He is strong enough to handle any situation. He is sufficient enough to deal victoriously with our enemy. He is powerful enough to protect, bless, and provide (28:3; 35:11). God wanted Abraham to know He was in control. Abraham might get discouraged traveling, trying to find the Promised Land. He might feel defeated by the conflicts with the enemy. So God said, "No reason to feel discouraged and defeated. Remember El-Shaddai will take care of you. The Almighty God won't let His mission fail!"

**ILLUS.** Napoleon said, "God is on the side of the heaviest artillery." At Waterloo, he was proved wrong, for the 160 guns of the English overcame the 250 guns of the French. God and one make a majority.

How helpless seemed William of Orange and the Hollanders against Spain and the religious forces of Rome, but God was with William of Orange. How helpless seemed the preacher, Parkhurst, against the combined wickedness of the great city, but God and right were on his side. During the antislavery struggle, a preacher said, "Gentlemen, it looks dark, but God is on our side, and how much do you count Him for? One shall chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight" (see Deut. 32:30, KJV).

With El-Shaddai on our side, we can overcome any enemy or obstacle in our path. We need not fear or be discouraged.

### B. *Satan makes accusations against us.*

Satan wanted to destroy the nation of Israel even before it got started. Satan whispered to Abram, "How can God make you into a great nation? You have no children of your own, except for this little boy you have conceived in an illicit affair. You blew it. Do you think God will use you to build a holy nation? That's a laugh! You're too old, too weak, too weary!"

Satan accuses and tries to destroy us from within. The front line for the battleground is in our minds. Satan knows that. If he can defeat our thoughts, he can defeat our faith. He tries to get us to concentrate on

our weaknesses rather than on the might of our God. That is why the apostle Paul tells us, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Phil. 4:8). We must guard our minds against the accusations and attacks of Satan.

### C. *God's name brings encouragement.*

God told Abraham, "I am Almighty God, El-Shaddai. Abraham, you see the obstacles and the problems, but I'm bigger than any of your problems. I will fulfill My promises."

God comes to us today to encourage and remind us that He is El-Shaddai. He is powerful enough to overcome any problem. He is sufficient enough to meet any need. We hear: "Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the fathers' sins into the laps of their children after them. O great and powerful God, whose name is the Lord Almighty, great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds" (Jer. 32:17-19). Jesus said, "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). The angel of the Lord said to Mary, "Nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). He is El-Shaddai, the Almighty God. But what are the conditions for God to become El-Shaddai to us?

## II. God Has Conditions for Abraham (v. 1)

### A. *We must walk before God.*

He doesn't want us to go our own direction, doing our own thing, setting our own course, but He wants us to follow Him. He allows us the privilege of being in fellowship with him each day.

**ILLUS.** A man learned what it means to walk with El-Shaddai. He wrote:

At first I saw God as my Observer, my Judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether or not I merited heaven or hell when I die. He was out there, sort of like the president. I recognized His picture when I saw it, but I didn't really know Him.

But, later on, when I recognized this Higher Power, it seemed as though life was rather like a bike ride; but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that God was in the back, helping me pedal.

I don't know just when it was He suggested that we trade places, but life has not been the same since—life with the Almighty One, that is. God makes life exciting!

But when He took the lead, it was all I could do to hang on! He knew delightful paths, up mountains and

through rocky places—and at breakneck speeds. Even though it looked like madness, he said, “Pedal!” and I obeyed.

I forgot my boring life and entered into adventure. When I’d say, “I’m scared,” He’d lean back and touch my hand.

He took me to people with gifts I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance, and joy. They gave me their gifts to take on my journey, our journey, God’s and mine.

At first, I did not trust Him in control of my life. I thought He’d wreck it, but He knows bike secrets—knows how to make it lean to take sharp corners, dodge large rocks, and speed through scary passages.

And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places. I’m beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant Companion.

When I’m sure I can’t do any more, He smiles and says, “Pedal!”

But there is a second condition.

### *B. We are to walk before Him in perfection.*

We are to live blameless. He wants us to live clean and pure lives. That is the kind of lives He calls us to live.

We don’t sin against God and try to excuse it by saying, “Oh, well, I’m only human!” We need to understand that we’re redeemed, we’re children of God, we’re in union with Jesus Christ. We need to look like it; act like it; live like it at work, home, school, car, everywhere!

We must follow the words, “But your hearts must be fully committed to the Lord our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time” (1 Kings 8:61), and live fully committed to God. Jesus instructs us, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

### **III. God Has a Covenant with Abraham (vv. 2-8)**

First, God told Abraham to be perfect, then He promised to keep His covenant. God’s promises are conditioned on our obedience. There is no telling what wonderful things God would do if we would do what He tells us. When He tells us to do something, don’t question, obey Him.

God’s promises depend on our walking in simple faith (vv. 15-17), believing that He will do what He said He will do (vv. 23-24), no matter how ridiculous it may seem on the surface. It is so easy to have puny faith when we assume we have a puny God. But, when we realize that He is El-Shaddai, the Lord God Almighty, the all-powerful Ruler of the universe, we will begin to see things happen.

**ILLUS.** Hudson Taylor wrote: “Many Christians estimate difficulties in the light of their own resources, and thus attempt little and often fail in the little they attempt. All God’s giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His power and

presence with them.”<sup>1</sup> Our faith becomes great as we realize that our God is great!

Dr. Robert Schuller tells about a tourist who was walking along on a seaside pier. He saw a fisherman pull in a big fish, measure it, and then throw it back in the ocean. The tourist was intrigued. He kept watching the fisherman. He caught a much smaller fish, measured it, and dropped it in his bucket. The fisherman kept doing this for some time. He would keep the little fish and throw the big fish back into the ocean. Finally, the tourist asked the fisherman why he kept throwing the big fish back and keeping the small ones. The fisherman replied, “Because my frying pan is only 10 inches across.”

We should not “throw back” the overwhelming miracles that God wants to perform. Allow God to be El-Shaddai, the Almighty God, and put our trust in His infinite greatness. He will make us what He wants us to be. Be prepared for God to do some great and marvelous things. For He is El-Shaddai!

1. Walter B. Knight, *Knight's Treasury of Illustrations* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), 262.

#### **SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER**

Hymn	“Come, Thou Almighty King”
Invocation	
Choruses	“Almighty” “I Sing Praises” “I Worship You, Almighty God”
Pastoral Prayer	
Chorus	“Antiphonal Praise (We Worship You)”
Choir	“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”
Reception of Tithes and Offerings	
Special Music	“El-Shaddai”
Sermon	“THE ALMIGHTY GOD: EL-SHADDAI”
Invitation Chorus	“Faith in God”
Benediction	

#### **Creative Worship Ideas**

##### **Invocation**

“Omnipotent God, lead us through praise to worship, through prayer to hope, through belief to faith, through trust to maturity, by the knowledge of the presence and the power of the truth found in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

—E. Lee Phillips

##### **Offertory Sentence**

“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Rom. 15:1, KJV).

##### **Benediction**

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen” (Eph. 3:20-21).

# THE LORD WILL PROVIDE

Jehovah-Jireh

by David W. Graves

Genesis 22:1-19

June 27, 1993

## INTRO:

**ILLUS.** I shall never forget it. On May 11, 1979, in Charlotte, N.C., the doctor held him up, and I saw my son, Michael. I stared at him. My son! What a thrilling experience that was and is, even to this day.

I can only imagine this feeling intensified in Abraham's heart. For Abraham was old when his son, Isaac, was born—old enough to be his grandfather or great-grandfather. At once, the boy delighted his heart. From the moment when Abraham stooped to awkwardly take the tiny baby in his arms, he was enrolled as an eager love slave of his son.

God commented on the strength of this bonding (Gen. 22:2, 12, 16). This baby boy represented everything sacred to his father's heart: the promises of God, the covenant made between them, the hope of the years, and the long messianic dream. The years passed. Then God steps in and tests Abraham.

## I. Abraham Is Tested (vv. 1-2)

God is testing Abraham's spiritual loyalties by touching the one he loved most dearly. Is his ultimate loyalty to God or to Isaac? Does he love God or Isaac the most?

*A. The test is divine in its origin. "God tested Abraham" (v. 1).*

1. God initiates the test.
2. Only God knows what is inside our hearts; only He can adequately search our hearts.
3. Only God knows where the battle line of total surrender and entire consecration lies.
4. Only God knows what vies for our devotion and love. Whether it is our hobbies, family, job, friends, sports, house, money, or something else.
5. Jesus said that we can't serve two masters (see Matthew 6), and God wanted to know whom Abraham served.

*B. The test is unexpected in its coming.*

1. Abraham had waited for 25 years for God's promise to be fulfilled and a son to be born.
2. Now that he had Isaac, God's promise was fulfilled.
3. But God tells him, "Take Isaac and kill him."
4. Most trials and tests come unexpectedly.
5. We must live close to God.

*C. The test is severe in its form (v. 2).*

1. I can only imagine the agony and the heartbreak Abraham felt that night on the slopes of Beersheba.
2. With his heart breaking, he wrestled alone under the stars with God.
3. If God would have demanded Abraham's life, that would have been easier, a thousand times easier.

4. For he was old and had lived a good life.
5. But for him to slay his son! How could he?
6. What about God's promise? "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. 21:12, KJV).

*D. The test is necessary in its coming.*

1. Abraham was the head of the faithful and the father of the promised multitudes.
2. Therefore, it was essential that he should be tried and found true.
3. It is necessary that we go through some trials to test our faith.
4. When trials come our way, we can praise God; for He sends them so that we may be made more mature and perfect (James 1:2-4, 12; 1 Pet. 1:6-9).

## II. Abraham Responds in Trust (vv. 3-10)

*A. Abraham stood silently as the stars shone like white points above the tent where sleeping Isaac lay. Long before the dawn, Abraham made up his mind to obey God.*

1. He would obey God regardless of the cost.
2. He didn't wait, consult friends, or find excuses to wait (v. 3).
3. What obedience, trust, and faith Abraham demonstrated!
4. We need to learn that entire obedience is the test of perfect faith.

**ILLUS.** The Choice Gleanings calendar once carried a story of an aviation cadet on a practice flight who was suddenly stricken with blindness. Frantically, he contacted the control tower and told of his desperate plight. His commanding officer radioed back, "Don't be afraid; just do what I tell you!" After being advised to keep circling the field until all was clear for a landing, the sightless pilot was instructed to begin losing altitude. As the aircraft approached the runway, the officer's voice called out encouragingly, "You're coming in right on target!" The cadet, giving unquestioned obedience to his commander, brought the plane down safely.

In a sense, we are all "flying blind" through life's dark way, not knowing the future. Yet, with the Scriptures and the Lord's wise providence guiding us, we can go forward without fear, assured that God's will is best!

5. I am sure Abraham didn't understand why, how, or for what reason God was asking him to do this. He simply obeyed!
6. If we would move out in entire obedience to God, then our faith would grow.
7. Abraham walked in obedience and faith (vv. 4-9).

*B. God stepped in at the last moment (v. 11).*

1. God let the suffering father go through with the

test up to the point where he knew there was no retreat. Then He stopped Abraham.

2. Faith, in order to become perfect, is often stretched to its limit, its last extremity.

3. Sometimes we may feel that God has deserted us; that He doesn't know what we are going through; that He doesn't care; or that the devil has won.

4. We have some great promises in 1 Cor. 10:13; 1:8-9; and 1 Pet. 4:19.

*C. God said in effect, "It's all right, Abraham! I never intended that you should actually slay the lad. I only wanted to remove him from the temple of your heart so that I might reign there unchallenged!"*

God wants to do the same with us.

### III. Abraham Is Rewarded for His Obedience (vv. 11-18)

*A. The son is delivered (vv. 11-13).*

1. At the point of entire surrender, the angel appears.

2. God often accepts our willingness for actual obedience.

*B. Abraham is blessed (vv. 15-18).*

**ILLUS.** When God asks us to surrender something of temporal worth, He does so for the purpose of replacing it with a prize of eternal value. Richard Cecil taught this lesson to his little daughter in a very dramatic way. As she sat upon his knee one day, he said to her, "If you truly love me, you will do whatever I ask." Then he told her to remove the inexpensive glass beads she was wearing and throw them into the fire.

Looking at him with surprise and wonder, she could hardly believe he meant what he said. Yet his steady gaze convinced her that he was in earnest. As she walked slowly to the fireplace with trembling step, she clutched her cherished possession.

At last, she reluctantly threw them into the flames. Then, flinging herself into her father's arms, she sobbed in bewilderment, not knowing why she had to suffer such a loss.

A few days later on her birthday, she found a little package on the table in her room. When she opened it, her eyes grew wide with excitement as she beheld a lovely necklace of genuine pearls. The card bearing her name was signed, "With love, Father."

Immediately, she ran to him and cried, "O Daddy, now I understand. I'm sorry I didn't trust you more!"

When God tests us and asks us to give up something we value, it is only because He has a greater blessing in store for us. For He is the God who provides.

*C. A new name for God is revealed (v. 14).*

1. Jehovah-Jireh means "the Lord will provide"!

2. God provides not only before the test but also in the midst of the test.

*a.* The three Hebrew children and Daniel could testify to the truth that God provides (Daniel 3; 6).

*b.* God provides something better than what we could provide.

3. Through our testing and trials, God provides renewal, growth, and maturity.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Hymn	"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee"
Choruses	"He Is Jehovah" "Jehovah-Jireh" "Awesome God"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir	"Forever King"
Reception of Tithes and Offerings	
Solo	"The Father Hath Provided"
Message	"THE LORD WILL PROVIDE: JEHOVAH-JIREH"
Invitation	"Have Thine Own Way, Lord"
Choral Benediction	"Go with God"

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Offertory Sentence

"Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion" (2 Cor. 9:10-11).

##### Offertory Prayer

Give us generous hearts, O God, whether we prosper or not, knowing that we will always have something worthy to contribute to the happiness and well-being of others and to offer You in praise and gratitude.



# THE LORD IS HEALER

## Jehovah-Repheka

by David W. Graves

Exod. 15:22-26

July 4, 1993

### INTRO:

Israel languished in captivity for years. They had been slaves to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. God told Moses to go and tell Pharaoh to "let my people go." Moses did so time after time.

Time after time, Pharaoh would say, "No, I won't." God sent plagues and diseases upon the nation of Egypt. Finally, Pharaoh had had enough and said, "Moses, take the people of Israel and go." So, they left.

On the first days' journey, Moses was leading the children of Israel to the Promised Land. But Pharaoh reconsidered their leaving and sent his army after them. You know what happened: mountains on one side, Pharaoh on the other, the Red Sea on the other. What terrible odds they faced! Moses prayed and God parted the Red Sea, and the people of Israel crossed on dry land.

This had all occurred when we come to Exodus 15. They had already crossed the Red Sea in triumphant victory. They had already seen the wonderful display of God's power and His control over man. They were now free to pursue their dreams of the Promised Land.

Three days into their journey a problem arose. As they were crossing the hot, dry wilderness of Shur, they could not find any water. Finally, they found water. I can imagine how the excitement built as they passed the word on back, "There's water ahead!" Their hopes were built up; they were keenly aware that this was God's provision for them. So, they ran to the waters and they began to drink—only to find that the water was bitter.

That's where we are when we come to Exod. 15:22. They are disappointed. They had faced the Red Sea in total dependence upon God, and He had come through. Now, they faced another obstacle in their journey to the Promised Land. Once again they would have to rely upon God in total dependence.

### I. Scolding Came from the Trial (vv. 22-24)

#### A. *The wilderness was barren (v. 22).*

A great victory like the Red Sea gave them a view of God's greatness and power. However, that experience did not prepare them for everyday life. The need for daily food and water sometimes tries our faith more than the great big problems of life. We all know that God can handle the big things. When God handles the big things, we give Him praise and glory. We are on top of the mountain. Then, the next day we get back down to the daily grind. Sometimes the devil trips us up more on daily living than he does on the crises of our lives. We prepare ourselves and brace ourselves for those tragedies, crises, tremendous tests of our faith. But when it comes to everyday living, the devil has a way of coming and tearing us apart and destroying our faith for our everyday needs. That is what was happen-

ing to the children of Israel. In the wilderness, God was training His people for everyday life.

In some respects, living for Jesus is no different than living without Him, in that life will have bright days and dark days. Life will have joy and sorrow. It will rain on the just and the unjust. The Israelites had not learned. Yes, they had learned that God would be with them when things were going good. Then, when it came down to the daily needs of life, they fell apart.

#### B. *The waters were bitter (v. 23).*

Imagine the disappointment of the people finding water that they could not drink. Look how they responded to this test: "So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, 'What are we to drink?'" (v. 24). Moses was God's representative, so when things did not go the way the people wanted them to go, they started doing what we do—grumbling, murmuring, and complaining.

#### C. *The words were biting (v. 24).*

Sometimes the trials we go through are good for us. They are good for our maturing, because they test the reality of our profession. It is easy to serve God when things are going great, but how do we do when things are not going so good? Are we fair-weather Christians? When things are sunny and bright, we are for Jesus. We love the Lord and are faithful to Him. Yet when the skies grow dark and the rain falls, we fall apart.

Sometimes God sends conflict to mature us past that place in our spiritual journey. Sometimes things don't go so easy. But I want you to know that even in the midst of those times, God is with us; He is maturing us, and He is growing us up.

Instead of learning their lesson and turning to God, they started murmuring, complaining, and griping. The great experiences with God do not necessarily cure the evil heart from complaining. The only cure for the evil heart and complaining is to have our self crucified and have God enthroned in our hearts.

**ILLUS.** Can you imagine what would happen to our marriages if we took these verses and started living them? Husbands and wives, if you never let anything come out of your mouth except that which is helpful in building up the other person, what a difference it would make in our homes! Our attitudes change when we are living for God. Paul says, "Throw off your old evil nature—the old you that was a partner in your evil ways—rotten through and through, full of lust and sham. Now your attitudes and thoughts must all be constantly changing for the better. Yes, you must be a new and different person, holy and good. Clothe yourself with this new nature" (Eph. 4:22-24, TLB).

You might say, "That's impossible to do." It is. That's why He says to crucify yourself. Get rid of the old self and let Christ live in you. That's the only way to control

what comes out. That's the only way to have a different way of looking at things. When it is no longer I that is living but Christ Jesus living in me, then the changes come.

The Israelites were not maturing in their faith.

## II. Sweetness Came from the Tree (v. 25)

*A. Sometimes our faith needs testing, and trials come so that we may be strong.*

They complained and God answered. However, they remained weak in their faith. God wasn't able to continue to mature them at that point. Many baby Christians aren't strong because they won't allow God to test them long enough so that they can become strong in Him. God heard their prayer and answered, but they remained weak in their faith. They got the water that they griped about, yet God did not see them proven the way He wanted.

*B. God turned the water sweet.*

God didn't say, "I'm leaving you as babies." He says: "I'm going to give you another opportunity."

## III. A Statement Came from the Throne (v. 26)

*A. God's character is revealed.*

God intended the healing of the waters to be a sign to Israel—proof of His ability and willingness to heal them of all their physical, natural, and spiritual diseases. God made the promise. He was Jehovah-Repheka: "The Lord who heals you." In this name, God guarantees He would always be their Healer. He is the same God who said to them, "I will turn the bitter experiences of your life into sweetness; I will come and I will touch you physically; I will keep the diseases away from you; I will do all of this for you because I am the Lord who heals you."

God has not changed His character. "I AM" is still the "I AM." As He was the Almighty, He is still the Almighty. As He was the Protector, He is still the Protector. As He was the Provider, He is still the Provider. As He was the Healer, He is still the Healer today.

*B. The conclusions we reach.*

1. It is God's will to heal His people so that He may be glorified.
2. God's will is not always instantaneous healing. Sometimes God demonstrates His love through giving us patience, strength, and grace instead of instantaneous healing.
3. God is in control and guarantees to us the truth of Rom. 8:28. We see things from such a limited perspective. But our God sees the whole picture and works it out for our good.

He talks here not only about physical healing. He is the Lord God who is able to heal physically, but also emotionally, financially, and spiritually. He can heal marriages and families. He can heal our thoughts and minds. He can heal our total person. Thank God; He is the Lord who heals us.

*C. The conditions we must meet (v. 26).*

The word "if" brings a condition. There are two conditions here for you to be healed.

1. The promise of healing is conditioned on our obedience.

"If you listen carefully to the voice . . . and do what is right . . . I will not bring on you any of the diseases" (v. 26). Obedience is a condition. "My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the well-spring of life" (Prov. 4:20-23). James 5:13 gives us a New Testament directive for healing. Sometimes we emphasize the prayer of faith so much that we forget God is saying something else. Sin is nothing more or nothing less than disobedience to God. Walk in obedience.

2. The promise of healing is conditioned on our faith.

God is Jehovah-Repheka. He is the Lord who will heal us and bring that healing to our body, to our emotions, to our marriage, to our home, and to our spirits. He is the Lord who heals us. If we walk in obedience to Him and if we walk in faith, He says it will be done to us according to our faith. The Word of God tells us simply this: We "have not, because" we "ask not" (James 4:2, KJV). Good Christian people walk around with all kinds of sickness, problems, and diseases that are eating them up spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Many don't understand that God is waiting to prove himself to them as Jehovah-Repheka.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Hymn	"Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty"
Choruses	"Blessed Be the Name of the Lord" "Worthy, You Are Worthy" "I Am the God That Healeth Thee"
Prayer	
Chorus	"Be Still and Know"
Reception of Tithes and Offerings	
Solo	"My Faith Has Found a Resting Place"
Message	"THE LORD IS HEALER: Jehovah-Repheka"
Choir	"Rise and Be Healed"
Prayer for Healing	

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Offertory Prayer

"Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to Thee, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly Thine, utterly dedicated unto Thee; and then use us, we pray Thee, as Thou wilt, and always to Thy glory and the welfare of Thy people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

—The Book of Common Prayer

# THE LORD IS PEACE

Jehovah-Shalom

by David W. Graves

Judg. 6:11-24

July 11, 1993

## INTRO:

It seems that God reveals precious things about himself when we worship Him in times of trouble. In Judges 6, we see another name for God. The chapter opens by telling how the Midianites were destroying the fields, villages, and herds of the Israelites.

For seven years they had been living in mountain clefts and caves. Life was utterly miserable for them.

Finally, the Israelites cried out for help. Then God sent a message: "Don't worry about the enemy. Don't you realize who I am? I am the same God who opened up the Red Sea. I am the same God who drove out your enemies. I am that same God. The promises I gave to you back there are still true. I will be your Helper." The Lord heard their cry and responded by sending an angel to a young man named Gideon.

## I. What Was the Cause of Gideon's Lack of Peace? (vv. 11-15)

### A. *Gideon's situation was not good (vv. 11-13).*

He was threshing wheat in a winepress, because of fear of the enemy. History had proven to Gideon that the enemy was mighty. The angel appeared and said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior" (v. 12).

Gideon responds: "You have got to be kidding me. Don't you know our situation? If God is with us, then why have all these bad things been happening to us? If God is with us, then why are our crops being taken from us and our herds being slaughtered? If God is with us, why are we living in mountain caves?" Gideon continues: "I have heard about the Lord and His strength and how He delivered our forefathers from captivity in Egypt and brought them across the Red Sea. But I have not seen anything in my day. And you are telling me that the Lord is with me" (see v. 13).

Gideon argues, "You said, 'Mighty warrior.' I am no mighty warrior."

His situation was causing his lack of peace. "God, You don't understand my situation—the things that are going on in my life. Maybe You can control others, but the things that are happening in my life are bad. If You are really with me, why are these things happening to me?" Have you ever been there?

### B. *Gideon's strength came from the Lord (vv. 14-15).*

The angel comes back and says, "Go in the strength you have." In other words, "I am sending you."

Gideon responds, "Do you mean, I am to go against that whole nation in my own strength and overcome them?"

"That's right, Gideon. For I am sending you, and I will be with you."

Gideon responded, "But, Lord, how can I save Israel? I am the weakest of the weak. I am nothing. Go and

get some mighty warrior. I am too weak. I can't do it" (see v. 15).

God says, "I am sending you."

God is saying to us who are faced with many situations and difficulties in life, "Don't worry about the situation, the difficulty. Just remember who I am and that I am sending you."

## II. What Was the Cure of Gideon's Lack of Peace? (vv. 16, 20-24)

### A. *The first step was Gideon's surety in God.*

"I will be with you" (v. 16).

The surety that Gideon had was that God would be with him. We have that surety. In our situations, in what we are going through, God is with us also. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (Isa. 43:2-3).

Times will come where it will seem as if a mighty flood of water is coming against us. But God says, "Don't worry, they won't harm you; they won't overtake you, for I will be with you." "Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matt. 18:20).

Jesus told His disciples, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). When we go to that workplace, God will be with us. When we go into that home situation that is not Christian and it is not easy, God will be with you. When your situation looks grave and your problems look insurmountable, don't worry. They won't overcome you because He will be with you. That cures the lack of peace. That will help us make it through even the difficult situations. That is our surety.

### B. *The second step was Gideon's soothing from God (vv. 20-24).*

Look at the soothing statement that comes from the Lord's angel: "Peace! Do not be afraid. You are not going to die" (v. 23). So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it "The Lord is Peace." God is Jehovah-Shalom, "the Lord is Peace." God wants to be our Lord of peace.

1. God wants to be Jehovah-Shalom to us spiritually.

We can have peace with God through Jesus Christ (see Eph. 2:13-17). "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its command-

ments and regulations" (vv. 14-15). Christ has reconciled us to God through His shed blood on Calvary's cross (see Col. 1:20-22).

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). No matter what your situation or how sinful you are, God wants to be your Peace spiritually.

2. God wants to be Jehovah-Shalom to us emotionally.

God does not intend for us to live defeated emotional lives—up and down, depressed, totally controlled by our emotions. God wants to bring us peace emotionally. God wants us to live peacefully, victorious and confident.

We can't live that way on our own, but we can through the grace of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you" (John 14:27). "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isa. 26:3, KJV).

3. God wants to be Jehovah-Shalom to us relationally. He wants to bring peace to our relationships in the church, in our marriages, in our homes, in our families. God does not want us at war with one another—unhappy, miserable, only existing. He can bring peace and joy to our marriages and families.

### III. Gideon's Commemoration of the Peace He Received (v. 24)

Gideon built an altar as a symbol of total surrender to Jehovah-Shalom. He built an altar as an act of dedication

to Him as the God who is Peace. If we dedicate ourselves to God, He can bring us peace. Peace—no matter how hopeless our situation looks. Peace—no matter how many times we have tried and our enemy has defeated us. Peace—no matter how weak or how tired we may be. We have His promise: "I will be with you, and I will be your Peace spiritually, emotionally, and relationally." God is Jehovah-Shalom.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Responsive Reading	"Perfect Peace"
Hymn	"Like a River Glorious"
Hymn	"Hidden Peace"
Hymn	"Wonderful Peace"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir	"Peace in the Midst of the Storm"
Reception of Tithes and Offerings	
Solo	"Thou Wilt Keep Him in Perfect Peace"
Message	"THE LORD IS PEACE: JEHOVAH-SHALOM"
Invitation	"He Is Our Peace"
Choral Benediction	"The Lord Bless You and Keep You"

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Offertory Sentence

"He that findeth his life shall lose it," said Jesus, "and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39, KJV).

##### Offertory Prayer

Lord, we have been told that You love a cheerful giver. Grant to us such an attitude toward You and our privilege of stewardship that we shall find our lives enriched as we give of our very selves, as well as of our money, to You.



"I'm leaving early, Miss Smithers. My wife wants me to work on my appearance . . . at home!"

# THE LORD IS OUR BANNER

Jehovah-Nissi

by David W. Graves

Exodus 17

July 18, 1993

## INTRO:

People march under different “banners.” What do you credit for making you what you are today? Perhaps you credit your brains. You think that you acquired the wonderful mate you live with, the home you live in, the car you drive, because of your own brains—your intellect. You tell other people that you got where you are today by outsmarting your competitors. Or perhaps you credit your success to your physical strength, or your family, or your hard work, or your money, fate, or pure luck. You credit these things for your successes. They are your banners as you march on to your personal victories. But if you march under any of these banners, you will follow it to defeat someday.

Moses learned that when he followed God, he conquered. When he let God blaze the trail before him, he had victory. Moses learned to let God be his Leader and his Banner. We see Moses learning this lesson in Exodus 17.

A paragraph occurs with this very significant statement, “The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites” (v. 8). The children of Israel had wandered through the wilderness a few months. They were thirsty and water was scarce. They were tired. They had pitched their tents in the wilderness at Rephidim. Rephidim is a rugged desert place near Mount Horeb. There was no water for them to drink. The armies of Amalek were passing down upon them. They felt utterly defeated. So the people started complaining to Moses once again.

Moses went to God, and He told Moses what to do. He directed Moses to a certain rock and told him to strike the rock with the staff that he had used to part the Red Sea. Moses did as God told him. Water gushed out of the rock to give the Israelites plenty to drink.

This occurred not a moment too soon, because the Amalekites descended upon them. Moses turned to his commander in chief, Joshua, and told him to muster an army against these invaders: “Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand” (v. 9, KJV). There was to be no white flag of surrender in this battle.

God’s order through His servant, Moses, was very clear: “Fight with Amalek” (v. 9, KJV). Moses knew that God would deliver them. He told Joshua that he would stand atop the mountain and raise the rod of God to remind the Israelites who was fighting for them that day. Aaron and Hur had to help him hold up his hands, but he kept the promise. And God kept His. The Israelites defeated the Amalekites that day.

What principle is God teaching us for today?

## I. We Need to Understand the Background of Amalek

### A. Where did Amalek come from?

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the fathers of Israel

to whom God appeared as God Almighty. God established His covenant with them forever. However, Isaac had two sons, twins named Esau and Jacob. Esau, the firstborn of the twins, should have been heir to Isaac. However, Esau despised his birthright, selling it for a bowl of stew, because of his hunger for flesh. He traded something of eternal value for temporal satisfaction. Esau’s grandson was Amalek. The same trait was passed down to Amalek, living for the flesh, the temporal.

## II. We Need to Look at the Battle

### A. Amalek was the first and constant enemy of Israel (v. 8).

1. See Num. 24:20, KJV (margin). Balaam was saying that Amalek was the first and foremost enemy of Israel. After they had come out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea and had eaten bread from heaven and drunk water from the rock, the first enemy they had to face was Amalek (Deut. 25:17-19), who “attacked . . . all the stragglers at your rear” (v. 18, NKJV)—the faint, the weak, the uninvolved. God didn’t want Israel to forget what the Amalekites had done to them. As Esau despised his birthright, not giving it proper value or respect, so his grandson, Amalek, did not respect God. They did not fear God.

### B. As Amalekites were the main enemy of Israel, the first and the foremost enemy that we face is the flesh.

It is the constant enemy of the Christian. “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Gal. 5:17). “Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8). “For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” (v. 13).

The first and foremost enemy of the Christian is the sinful nature, the flesh. If you allow the flesh to have control, you will die spiritually. It attacks you from the rear—points of weakness, stragglers, the uninvolved.

### C. Amalekites were to be totally destroyed (1 Sam. 15:1-3, 7-9, 16-23). God had one way to deal with the Amalekites: total destruction.

God has only one way of dealing with the flesh: total destruction. We are to totally destroy the flesh, the nature of sin. Paul wrote, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24). When Romans crucified someone, he was hung on the cross until he was dead. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live,



but Christ lives in me" (2:20). The flesh no longer lives. There is a battle in our spiritual lives until we are willing to have the flesh, the sin nature, destroyed. Every part of the sinful nature or flesh, our enemy, is to be destroyed.

### III. We Need to Live Under God's Banner

#### A. How did Moses, Joshua, and Israel destroy the Amalekites? (Exod. 17:16).

It's the Lord's battle; victory depended on God's rod, the banner. A banner was an ensign or standard carried at the head of a military army to indicate the line of march or the rallying point. When God's banner was lifted up, they won the battle.

Our banner is the Lord. Under His banner there is victory! God tells us, "Do not be faint-hearted or afraid; do not be terrified or give way to panic before them. For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory" (Deut. 20:3-4).

The only way Israel had victory was when God was with them. When they walked away from God, they were defeated. When they served God and had His banner before them, they were victorious.

#### B. The only way we can defeat and destroy the flesh is by having the banner of God.

We are in a battle, but there is no excuse for waving a white flag of surrender. For "we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" (Eph. 6:10). "Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Gal. 5:16).

Only by abiding in God's power, under His banner, the ensign of Jehovah-Nissi, can we have victory over the flesh, the world, the devil—our enemies. Praise God that when we go to war, we know that we will be victorious because the Lord is our Banner! He is Jehovah-Nissi!

**ILLUS.** Ken Forsch, a pitcher for the Houston Astros baseball team, had to learn this lesson the hard way. During the 1977 playing season, he injured his right arm. Although the doctors and trainers were able to relieve the pain, he lost most of the strength he needed in that arm. For the rest of the season, he was a poor pitcher.

He did no better at the start of the 1978 season. Every time he came to the mound, batters usually got an easy hit. Ken put himself through a grueling series of exercises to toughen his muscles, trying to regain the strength of his grip. But he didn't improve. His wife and friends prayed for him because they knew his career might soon be over. After another dismal failure in a game with Pittsburgh, Ken went back to his hotel room and collapsed in despair. He knew all too well that his problem was too much for him to handle. He couldn't go on in his own strength.

In quiet acceptance, he bowed his head and turned the

problem over to the Lord, to do with as He wished. And he slept peacefully.

Soon the Astros met the Montreal Expos in a double-header. The first game tied and went into the 12th inning with the bases loaded. Then Ken was called to pitch. He promptly struck out three men and won the game.

In the second game, he was called to pitch in the bottom of the eighth inning. He helped the Astros win again. After that, his coach put Ken back into the starting lineup, and he won 8 of the next 10 games.

On the second day of the 1979 season, Ken pitched his first no-hitter against Atlanta. Thinking back on that experience, Ken realized what his struggle had been. He had been insistent on doing things his way, deliberately refusing to think about what God might have in mind. But Ken learned well that when he asked God to take charge, He worked his life out even better than he could have imagined.<sup>1</sup>

That's what Moses and the Israelites learned at Rephidim. God the Banner must always be in front of our lives, leading the way, if we are going to have victory over the enemy of our soul.

1. Ken Forsch, "Have It Your Way, Lord," *Gutdeposts*, April 1981, 30-31.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Hymn	"Rejoice, the Lord Is King"
Invocation of Praise for Victory	
Choruses	"I Love to Praise Him"
	"Lift High the Lord Our Banner"
	"Mighty Warrior"
	"Praise the Name of Jesus"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir	"We Have Won"
Reception of Tithes and Offerings	
Solo	"Destined to Win"
Message	"THE LORD IS OUR BANNER: Jehovah-Nissi"
Invitation Hymn	"Not My Will, but Thine"
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Offertory Sentence

"Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:33-34).

##### Offertory Prayer

God of love and grace, help us see increasingly that our true wealth is in Thee, not in the riches and things we have accumulated. Yet let us not despise the opportunity to advance our spiritual growth through the offering to Thee of those very things through which the lives of others may be blessed.

# THE LORD WHO SANCTIFIES

## Jehovah-Mekoddishkem

by David W. Graves

Lev. 19:2; 20:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:13-16; 2:9

July 25, 1993

### INTRO:

Israel was to be "a kingdom of priests"; God chose them to be "a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6). For the first time, God was calling a people—not just one or two persons but a whole nation—to be priests. He called them to be a nation of holy priests. The nation would characterize God. To accomplish this, God brought His people to Mount Sinai, where He gave them the covenant of the law and the pattern of the Tabernacle. There they would worship Him.

The law was given to make them a holy nation. They received a pattern of worship so that they could become a kingdom of priests. The commandments set them apart as a people for God's "own possession" (Exod. 19:5, NASB; Lev. 20:7). He tells them to be holy (Leviticus 19—20). They could be holy because God would make them holy. They would come to know God as Jehovah-Mekoddishkem, "the Lord who sanctifies" them (20:8, NASB).

As Israel was called to be obedient and holy and a nation of priests, so are we. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

### I. God Called His People to Be Holy

#### A. *We are called to be holy, set apart, sanctified.*

Each one has been set apart from the profane, unholy, unclean to be totally devoted to God. Paul wrote, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it" (1 Thess. 5:23-24). Peter wrote, "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

God called us, not to live in sin, but to be separated from sin, dedicated to God. God's goal for us is holiness.

#### B. *Jesus was crucified and resurrected from the dead so that we may be holy.*

We read, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:25-27). "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). "And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore" (13:12-13).

### II. What Are the Results of a Life of Holiness? (Lev. 20:7-8)

A. *One result of a holy life is daily fellowship with God.* When we separate ourselves to God and from that which is sinful and unholy, then we open ourselves up to God. He gives himself totally to us, reveals himself, and loves us. Keep God's decrees, and you will have fellowship with Him.

Separating ourselves from the world and sin, and devoting ourselves totally to God, we come into a fellowship with Him such as we have never known. Responding to the call to be holy, our goal is to know God better.

When we separate ourselves to God, He fills us with His Spirit. The goal is not primarily forgiveness, nor victory over sin, nor peace of soul, nor hope of heaven. It is fellowship with God.

#### B. *Another result of a holy life is cleansing.*

"I am the Lord, who makes you holy" (v. 8). When we commit ourselves unreservedly to God, He reveals himself to us, cleanses us, and makes us holy. The fruit of our fellowship with God is holiness. As we open ourselves to Him, He continually cleanses and fills us with His Spirit.

**ILLUS.** A young minister was being escorted through a coal mine. At the entrance of one of the dim passages, he spied a beautiful white flower growing out of the black earth. "How can it blossom in such purity and radiance in this dirty mine?" the preacher asked.

"Throw some coal dust on it and see for yourself," his guide replied.

When he did, he was surprised that the fine, sooty particles slid right off the snowy petals, leaving the plant lovely and unstained. Its surface was so smooth that the grit and grime could not adhere to it.

In commenting on this incident, an unknown author says, "Our hearts should have the same characteristic. Just as that flower could not control its habitat, so we cannot help it that we have to live in a world filled with evil. But God's grace can keep us so clean and unspotted that though we touch sin on every side, it will not cling to us" (IC. Sanctification 1.1).

Just as God provides the remedy for sins through His forgiveness, so He provides the remedy for the sin nature through His cleansing. He cleanses us from our sinful desires, appetites, and affections. We go from being self-controlled to God-controlled. "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22). "For we know that our old self [old affections, old

appetites, old way of behaving] was crucified with him so that the body of sin [sinful nature] might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin” (Rom. 6:6-7). “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (v. 11). “You have been set free from sin [old self, old corrupt nature, old sinfulness, old person that makes us do the things we don’t want to do] and have become slaves to righteousness” (v. 18). “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness [and that is what we are called to], and the result is eternal life” (v. 22). I am thankful that Jesus Christ provided forgiveness for the sins we committed and the cure for our sin nature.

**ILLUS.** God tells us to stop sinning. We say we won’t do it anymore. But, under the control of the sin nature, we find ourselves sinning. It is like telling a left-handed person not to be left-handed anymore. He can try to be right-handed, but if he drops something, he will naturally pick it up with his left hand. His nature tells him to be left-handed, even if he doesn’t want to be.

I am so glad that God says, “I want you to be holy, and I am going to make you holy!” “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature” (Gal. 5:16-17). “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (vv. 24-25).

Jesus came and shed His blood so that we might be not only forgiven of our sins but also cleansed of that old, sinful nature that causes us to sin.

We can be free from that nature as God makes us holy. He calls us to be holy as He is holy. He is the Lord who will make us holy. If we surrender ourselves totally and

unreservedly to God, He will cleanse us and make us holy.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Hymn	“Holiness unto the Lord”
Scripture Reading	Lev. 19:2; 20:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:13-16; 2:9
Chorus	“When I Look Into Your Holiness” “I Love You, Lord” “O to Be like Thee”
Hymn	“O to Be like Thee”
Pastoral Prayer	
Reception of Tithes and Offering	
Musical Package	“The Delusion of Sovereignty” “Break Me, Lord” “When His Kingdom Comes” “Jesus, Be the Lord of All” “He Is Lord”
Message	“THE LORD WHO SANCTIFIES: JEHOVAH-MEKODDISHKEM”
Invitation Hymn	“Cleanse Me”

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Offertory Sentence

“Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chron. 16:29, KJV).

#### Offertory Prayer

“You have given us life, O Lord. You have given all that we have. Every good gift has come from You. In gratitude to You, we are glad for the opportunity to share our material blessings with You. Freely You have given unto us. Freely we now give for others, to the end that the Kingdom might come in the lives of those who know You not.”

—Donald W. Musser



“PASTOR COLEY MAKES A THIRD UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO SWALLOW THE 1-2 OUNCE GRISTLE DISCOVERED IN THE PETENBRINK SISTERS’ FAMED SUNDAY POT ROAST.”

# THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

Jehovah-Raah

by David W. Graves

Psalm 23

August 1, 1993

## INTRO:

David's beautiful Psalm 23 is unsurpassed for its devotional spirit. This pearl of the Psalms is a priceless gem—the psalm of all psalms. The metaphor of the shepherd, as David knew it, is essentially emotional as well as devotional. David, a shepherd, looked at his Heavenly Father and said, "The Lord is my shepherd."

The shepherd of the Orient was as tender and sacrificial as an affectionate mother. He would sacrifice his own life for the sake of the sheep. The shepherd would be their watchman, protector, provider, companion, physician, comforter, pathfinder, and savior.

If the shepherd were taken from the sheep, they would become distressed, scattered, undone, pathetic, and helpless. They would stumble among rocks, or bleed in the thorns, or flee wildly with fear. But the good shepherd would never forsake his sheep. In the morning, he goes before them. During the day, he protects and feeds them. At night, he lies down in their midst.

What the shepherd is to his sheep, Jesus the Good Shepherd is to us. We are His sheep; He is our Shepherd. In Him, we shall not want. He desires that His sheep be satisfied, contented, well fed, safe, and flourishing.

However, for sheep to be content, they must have four freedoms.

## I. Sheep Need a Freedom from Hunger (vv. 2-3)

*A. For sheep to be completely content, they must be free from hunger.*

They will not lie down unless they are well fed. In the dry, semiarid areas, green pastures are the result of tremendous labor, time, and skill. They are the result of clearing rough, rocky land; tearing up brush, roots, stumps; deep plowing; seeding; and planting.

But green pastures are essential to success with sheep. To the sheep, green pastures were a perfect food supply. Tender grass contained all the elements essential for the nourishment and growth of the sheep. Green pastures would bring contentment and satisfaction to the sheep.

*B. As the shepherd satisfies the hunger of the sheep by green pastures, Jesus can satisfy our hunger.*

Because of our created nature, we can only be satisfied by being in contact with the Shepherd. For us to find satisfaction, we must have the hunger of our spirits met. The only bread that will satisfy us is Jesus Christ. "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to

me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare" (Isa. 55:1-2). What can we eat that will satisfy? "Jesus [told His followers,] 'Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you'" (John 6:26-27). "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' 'Sir,' they said, 'from now on give us this bread.' Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty'" (vv. 32-35).

If you are hungry, dissatisfied, discontent with your life, then come to Jesus. He is the Bread of Life. You will never hunger or thirst again. We who know Jesus Christ as our Lord must understand that as we eat food every day, we must also fill our spiritual hunger daily. Many Christians come to Jesus, expecting a onetime feeding to supply them for the rest of their lives.

He is the Bread of Life. He wants us to continually come to Him for our nourishment, contentment, and satisfaction. We must continually eat at His table. His Word fills us and satisfies us (Deut. 8:3; 1 Pet. 2:2, KJV; Heb. 5:12-14; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Do you want satisfaction? First, meet the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Second, continue to feed on His Word. The sheep will not lie down if they are hungry, and they will not lie down if they are afraid.

## II. Sheep Need a Freedom from Fear (vv. 3-4)

*A. Sheep are helpless, timid animals with little means of self-defense.*

They are easily frightened. One jackrabbit can stampe a whole flock. When one runs in fright, all the others follow in blind fear. They are virtually defenseless without the shepherd to protect them.

All kinds of things can bring fear. With God as our Shepherd we can be free from fear. Freed from fear of the unknown, He will guide us. We need not fear the future, for the unknown is known to God. The Good Shepherd doesn't push the sheep out in front of Him. He leads them and they follow. He walks before them. He protects them. Any animal or anything that might harm the sheep, the shepherd handles. Our Shepherd walks before us. No matter what we face, Jesus is before us.

Jesus frees us from the fear of death. Even though we "walk through the valley of the shadow of death," we can fear no evil (1 Cor. 15:26, 54-57; Rom. 14:8). We will not die eternally. Our bodies will die, but as

Paul wrote, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). God's Word says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Ps. 116:15).

Jesus frees us from the fear of bodily harm. His rod and staff comfort us. God has weapons. He is our Defense, Fortress, Hiding Place, Refuge, and Shield. He is encamped around us. He covers us "with his feathers, and under his wings [we] will find refuge" (Ps. 91:4). He is our Defense and our Protection. The Lord is our Shepherd.

### III. Sheep Need a Freedom from Friction (v. 5)

*A. In animal societies, there is an established order of dominance or status within the group.*

With chickens, it is called the "pecking order." With cattle, it is called the "horning order." With sheep, it is called the "butting order."

Generally, an arrogant, cunning, and domineering old ewe will be boss. She maintains her position of prestige by butting and driving other lambs or ewes away from the best grazing or bed grounds. An old ewe might walk up to a younger one feeding contentedly and arch her neck, tilt her head, dilate her eyes, and approach in a gait. Either the younger one moves over, or she will be butted until she does move (Ezek. 34:15-16, 20-22).

Because of this rivalry, tension, and competition for status and self-assertion, there is friction in the flock. Sheep cannot lie down and rest in contentment, because they feel they have to defend themselves.

*B. The shepherd's presence makes the difference.*

His presence puts an end to all rivalry and tensions (Matt. 6:12, 14-15; 5:23-24, 48).

### IV. Sheep Need a Freedom from Pests (v. 5)

*A. Sheep can be aggravated and driven to distraction by flies, parasites, and other pests that seek to torment or destroy them.*

Nasal flies were the most dangerous of the pests. The flies would lay eggs in the nostrils of the sheep. When the eggs hatch into wormlike larvae, they would imbibe themselves in the head of the sheep.

Satan uses pests to defeat God's sheep. Sometimes they are thoughts of rejection, or fear, or bitterness, or hatred, or failure, or sensuality, or greed, or envy. All of these are planted by our enemy. If we allow them to hatch, to burrow their way into our minds, then those thoughts defeat our walk with Jesus Christ.

Praise God, we have protection against these thoughts. The Psalmist wrote: "You anoint my head with oil" (v. 5). The shepherd would take a mixture of linseed oil with some sulphur and other ingredients and would cover the head of the sheep. The pests, flies, and gnats would not bother the sheep as long as their heads were covered with oil.

The Good Shepherd covers our minds with His anointed presence (Phil. 4:6-9). God will give us freedom from hunger and satisfy us; He will give freedom from fear of the unknown and death; He will give us freedom from pests and friction. But look at the end result (v. 6). "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (v. 6).

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want" (v. 1). Believe Him and you will know a life of perfect rest. Walk in Him and you will experience contentment no matter what your circumstances. The Lord is my Shepherd, and I am completely satisfied!

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Responsive Reading	"The Lord Is My Shepherd"
Hymn	"Praise Him! Praise Him!"
Chorus	"O How He Loves You and Me"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir	"Gentle Shepherd Medley"
Reception of Tithes and Offerings	
Duet	"Shepherd of Love"
Message	"THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD: JEHOVAH-RAAH"
Invitation—Solo	"Only Jesus Can Satisfy Your Soul"
Benediction	Heb. 13:20-21

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Offertory Sentence

"The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:9, KJV).

##### Offertory Prayer

Our loving Father, help us to realize that in good times and bad You are the same gracious God, yesterday, today, and forever. Strengthen our faith so that we can believe, even when we cannot see, that Your tender care enfolds us all. When material blessings abound, keep us from forgetting You. When things are scarce, may we still be faithful.



# HE IS LORD

## Adonai

by David W. Graves

Gen. 15:1-6

August 8, 1993

### INTRO:

Abraham had won a great victory and had given a tenth of all he possessed to the mysterious and somewhat elusive king of Salem, Melchizedek. At this time, Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High (El-Elyon) spoke so that Abraham understood that El-Elyon, the Sovereign God, brought about this victory (Gen. 14:19-20).

Abraham finally addresses God as his Master when he says, "Lord [*Adonai*] God [*Jehovah*]" (Gen. 15:2, KJV). Anytime "LORD" appears in capital and small capital letters, it is translated from *Jehovah*. If "Lord" is in small letters, it is translated from *Adonai*. What was God revealing about himself in the name Adonai?

### I. We Can Have a Relationship with God (v. 2)

#### A. Abraham understood the Master-servant relationship with God.

1. Abraham had many servants. In his day the lot of a servant was not one to be pitied.
2. A bond servant or slave was far better off than a hired servant because his master totally provided for him.
3. The Master must protect and aid his slave according to his need, even to giving direction in his day-to-day living.
4. Slaves were considered part of the household.

#### B. We have this Master-servant relationship with God.

1. It is far better for us to be with God than without Him.
2. God totally provides for us.
3. We belong to God's family.

### II. Our Sufficiency Is in God (vv. 2-3)

#### A. Man's sufficiency rests in the Lord (*Adonai*) who fits each one of us especially for the work committed to us.

1. God supplies what we need to perfect His will.
2. God did so for Moses (Exod. 4:10-12).
3. God did so for Joshua (Josh. 1:7-8).
4. God did so for Gideon (Judg. 6:13-16).

**ILLUS.** A minister in Virginia phoned in his Sunday morning sermon title to the religion editor of the local newspaper. He said, "The topic for my message is 'The Lord Is My Shepherd.'"

"Is that all?" asked the editor.

Trying to make a spiritual point, the pastor replied, "That's enough!"

On Saturday, when the paper was delivered to the preacher's door, he immediately opened it to the section containing the church notices. His topic for the sermon read: "The Lord Is My Shepherd—That's Enough!" The editor had made a mistake, but it turned out to be very appropriate.

Charles H. Spurgeon said, "I have all things and abound; not because I have a good store of money in the bank, not because I have a good skill and wit with which to win my bread, but because 'The Lord Is my Shepherd and my supplier.'"

#### B. The servant's strength is in his Lord.

1. All God's servants have proven this true.
2. God's strongest saints realize their weaknesses and appeal to Him for strength.

**ILLUS.** One Sunday morning, as Charles H. Spurgeon passed through the door back of the pulpit in the Tabernacle and saw the great crowd of people, he was overheard saying, 'O God, help!' Strong as he was, he realized that he was insufficient for so great a task as preaching the gospel in power unless God should be his Helper.

3. Read Jer. 1:4-10.

We are dependent upon God for our sufficiency and for our blessings.

### III. Our Blessings Are from God (vv. 4-5)

#### A. With God as our Master, we have certain blessings from Him (see v. 1; Pss. 123:2; 145:14-16).

### IV. Our Responsibility Is to God (v. 6)

#### A. Our responsibility is to bow before God's throne and say, "My Lord."

**ILLUS.** Sir Leonard Wood once visited the king of France. The king was so pleased with him that he invited him for dinner the next day.

Sir Leonard went to the palace; but the king, meeting him in one of the halls, said, "Why, Sir Leonard. I did not expect to see you. How is it that you are here?"

"Did not Your Majesty invite me to dine with you?" said the astonished guest.

"Yes," replied the king, "but you did not answer my invitation."

Then it was that Sir Leonard Wood uttered one of the choicest sentences of his life. He replied, "A king's invitation is never to be answered, but to be obeyed!" When God tells us to do something, our immediate response should be one of obedience.

#### B. As *Adonai*, God has a right to expect obedience.

1. For this reason God became angry with Moses when He called him to go before Pharaoh and tell him to let His people go (Exod. 4:13-14).
2. Moses was saying, "Lord, Lord" (*Adonai*), but was not trusting and submitting to God (see Matt. 7:21-27; Luke 6:46-49).
3. God looks for the obedient servant who will say, "Lord, Lord," and will do His will.
4. Isaiah responded, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" (Isa. 6:8). We should respond in obedience.

C. When we respond in obedience, God can use us.

**ILLUS.** W. B. Riley used to tell the story of a man who had walked the streets of Philadelphia, searching for employment. One day he happened to go into the office of a well-known businessman by the name of Girard. When he asked for a job, Mr. Girard answered, "Yes, I can give you work. See that pile of bricks out there? Carry them over to the other end of the yard and stack them up."

By nightfall the man reported that the project was completed and received his pay. When asked if there would be more work the next day, his employer said, "Yes, come in tomorrow and carry those same bricks back to where you found them."

The following morning he came early and got busy without a word. For more than a week, he was instructed to carry bricks back and forth until it was evident that he could be trusted to do exactly as he was told.

Then he was given a new and bigger responsibility—to go downtown and bid on a large quantity of sugar. Not recognizing him, the people at the auction were surprised by the bid of this stranger. When it was accepted, the auctioneer asked who would pay the bill. "Mr. Girard," the man replied; "I am his agent." He had earned this position by being faithful in a menial task. We will be blessed by the Lord as we are faithful and obedient to His Word.

1. If God is God, then He must be Adonai—Lord and Master.

### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Scripture Reading	Ps. 96:4
Choir	"You Are Worthy to Be Praised"
Choruses	"No Other Name"
	"Blessed Be the Name of the Lord"
	"Worthy, You Are Worthy"
	"I Love You, Lord"
Pastoral Prayer	
Hymn	"I Will Praise Him"
Reception of Tithes and Offerings	
Ladies Trio	"Ceaseless Praise"
Message	"HE IS LORD: ADONAI"
Choir Medley	"His Lordship"

### Creative Worship Ideas

#### Offertory Sentence

"Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High" (Ps. 50:14, KJV).

#### Offertory Prayer

We thank You, O Father, for the multitude of Your mercies. Even as our voices speak words of gratitude, grant that our deeds may likewise praise You.

#### Benediction

"God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

### FALLOWFIELD

DUE TO THEIR UNFORTUNATE LOOKS, FIRST CHURCH COULD NOT TAKE ITS LEADERSHIP VERY SERIOUSLY.



# THE LORD IS THERE

## Jehovah-Shammah

by David W. Graves

Ezekiel 37; 48:35

August 15, 1993

### INTRO:

Ezekiel is a book of captivity, written to the Jews who had been taken captive into Babylon. However, as Ezekiel opens his book, the city of Jerusalem still had not been destroyed. Ezekiel prophesies Jerusalem's fall. The city would fall because the glory of the Lord would depart from the Temple (chaps. 10—11).

For 32 chapters Ezekiel is saying, "Jehovah is not there." Then in chapters 33—48, the prophet gives hope, "Jehovah is there." The hope was the promise of God's return to Jerusalem. Once again He would be Jehovah-Shammah.

### I. The Name Jehovah-Shammah Describes a Wonderful Fact: "The Lord Is There" (37:25, 27)

*A. Sin drives away our consciousness of God, though He is never really absent.*

When we are reconciled to God, He draws near to us. Ezekiel is talking about God's real presence, not just a thought or a feeling (vv. 25-26). What a reality—that God will be with us! God is there continuously. We never need to worry whether God is with us or not. He is ever with His people. No matter what we face, God is with us. This name also represents the wonderful fact of His wide presence. He filled the whole city, so all the citizens may enjoy His fellowship. His presence is not restricted to one or two, but He is present with us all.

### II. The Name Jehovah-Shammah Denotes a Happy Condition (37:21-26)

God is going to bring them out of captivity. He is going to bring them back into their land. Who is going to restore? God! He is going to protect them and make them one nation. He is the God who will protect us also (37:21-22). God is the Commander with innumerable heavenly armies whom He can summon to protect His people. We have a refuge from our problems, a friend to comfort, and someone to turn to in need. God will protect us and bring restoration. God will rule over us (vv. 22, 24). He is the King who will govern over us. Many voices tell us to do this and do that, but as God's children, we follow His Rulership and guidance. His presence brings life and blessing. He will "increase their numbers" (v. 26). When God's presence is restored in our life, He will prosper us—not by being rich but by being blessed by Him.

### III. The Name Jehovah-Shammah Declares an Important Truth (v. 23)

Not only is God with His people, but He is with us today.

*A. God is observant (v. 23).*

God knows exactly where we are. He knows our ac-

tions, our weaknesses, our sins. As Jehovah-Shammah, He knows our thoughts and fears.

**ILLUS.** In the pioneer days of the United States, a boy's home was situated in the backwoods. A school had been opened several miles away from his home. Part of the way to the school led through a dense forest. The boy's father was a strong, brave backwoodsman. He wanted his son to grow up strong and brave. So he told his son that he would have to go to school alone! When the boy walked through the dark forest, he always expected to meet a bear or some wild Indians.

With the passing of days and weeks, his fear subsided. Then one afternoon, he saw a great bear standing in his pathway! The bear growled and glowered at the boy. The boy stood motionless, filled with fear. Even if he had run, the bear would have outrun him.

As he stood there, a shot rang out. The bear fell dead. From the bushes, his father emerged. "It's all right, Son. I've been with you all the time. Every morning I have followed you to school. Every afternoon I have been in the shadows watching you. I kept myself hidden because I wanted you to learn to be brave!"

God has promised His children: "Do not fear, for I am with you" (Isa. 41:10).

God observes every part of our lives. He knows our weaknesses and He can help us. He knows the good we do (Gen. 28:15; Matt. 28:20). God watches over us (John 14:20; Ps. 145:17-19).

*B. God is active.*

Our Lord is with us, not only observing but also acting graciously for us. He becomes actively involved in our spiritual lives. God does not set the whole world in order and then sit back on His throne to keep score. To the contrary, He is not removed from us. He is actively involved. He illuminates our minds by His Holy Spirit. He sustains us spiritually by His power (Eph. 1:19). He responds to our devotion and accepts our praise and adoration. He hears and answers our prayers. He energizes our work, making it fruitful and enabling us to speak for Him. He is there. He is Jehovah-Shammah.

*C. God is sympathetic.*

He will be our God, and we will be His people (v. 23). He claims us as His children. He is with us at all times—good and bad. In times of trouble, God is especially real to us as Friend and Deliverer (Pss. 34:18-19; 46:1-3; Isa. 43:2-3). God is with us in the trials of life, in the anxieties of daily duties, in our pressing problems and struggles. God identifies with us where we find ourselves.

**ILLUS.** Dr. George W. Truett told about a grief-stricken

father and his little girl who stood at the graveside of his wife and her mother. After the funeral, kind friends said to the sorrowing husband, "You and your little girl come home with us for the night. It will be easier for you."

"No," said he, "we will go back to the scene of her suffering and trust God's grace to sustain us."

That night the little girl was late in getting to sleep. Her little bed was moved alongside her father's bed. In the darkness she would say, "Daddy, it's so dark, but you are there, aren't you, Daddy?"

The father placed his hand on her head and said, "Yes, Daddy is right here. Now go to sleep!" Before long the little girl fell soundly asleep.

Then in the darkness and gloom the father weepingly said, "O Heavenly Father, it is so dark, and my heart is so overwhelmed with sorrow; but You are there, aren't You, Father?"

The sure promise came instantly to his mind: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:10). God is Jehovah-Shammah.

#### IV. The Name Jehovah-Shammah Demands a Repentant Spirit (48:35)

"From that time on." What is "that time"? What was the event or the act that would make it possible for the Lord to be with them in that city? It was a repentant spirit that led to a time of restoration and rebuilding the city. There will never be restoration until we have a repentant heart. Sin caused God to leave them. It was their worship of idols that caused Jerusalem to be destroyed. God said, "If you repent, then I will be Jehovah-Shammah."

**ILLUS.** Donald Grey Barnhouse tells of the time that Governor Neff of Texas visited the penitentiary of that state and spoke to the assembled convicts. When he had finished, he said that he would remain behind. If any man wanted to speak to him, he would gladly listen. He further announced that he would listen in confidence. Nothing a man might say would be used against him.

When the meeting was over, a large group of men remained, many of them life termers. One by one, they passed by, each telling the governor that there had been a frame-up, an injustice, a judicial blunder, and each asking that he be freed.

Finally, one man came up and said, "Mr. Governor, I just want to say that I am guilty. I did what they sent me here for. But I believe I have paid for it. If I were granted the right to go out, I would do everything I could to be a good citizen and prove myself worthy of your mercy."

Because of his repentant spirit, the governor pardoned him.

When we repent of our sins, God will pardon us. Through redemption, He comes to make us holy. God

calls us back to himself. He desires to protect us, to bless us, to love us if we come with a repentant heart. As God dwelt in Jerusalem, He will dwell in us as soon as we repent and return to Him (Rev. 3:20). God is Jehovah-Shammah.

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choruses	"Surely the Presence" "Cover Me"
Invocation	
Choruses	"O the Glory of Your Presence" "In His Presence"
Pastoral Prayer	
Chorus	"I Will Bless the Lord"
Reception of Tithes and Offerings	
Hymn	"How Firm a Foundation"
Choir	"I Sing the Mighty Power of God"
Message	"THE LORD IS THERE: JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH"
Invitation Hymn	"Fill Me Now"
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

##### Invocation

O God of light, illuminate our way. O God of hope, strengthen our resolve. O God of truth, edify our souls, that we might be not only hearers of the Word but also doers. May we be keenly aware that You are present today. May we feel Your presence. May we be covered with Your hallowed presence in this hour. This we ask in the name of Christ our Lord.

##### Reception of Tithes and Offerings

Orchestra or instruments begin playing "How Firm a Foundation," then the congregation joins at the appropriate time.

##### Offertory Sentence

"They gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will" (2 Cor. 8:3, RSV).

##### Offertory Prayer

O ever-present Master, who by Your love has filled our hearts and hands with so many blessings, who has liberated us from the guilt of our past, who has freed us from want in our stomachs, who has freed us from ignorance, who has freed us from fear by Your grace, accept our thanks and our gifts, and grant that our hearts may always be filled with the contentment of Your peace. Bless these gifts, that they may expand the places of joy, that they may by Your Spirit multiply in glad service to Your kingdom, for we pray as Christ taught us to pray together: The Lord's Prayer.

# THE GOD WHO SEES

Jehovah-Roi

by David W. Graves

Genesis 16

August 22, 1993

## INTRO:

God promised to make Abram into a great nation—through his wife, Sarai (Gen. 12:1-3). Ten years passed and nothing happened. The promise that Abram's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky remained unfulfilled. Sarai, his wife, continued to be childless. To Sarai, it seemed that God was not going to act and fulfill His promise. She decided that God needed her help. So she relied upon a custom of her day and her own resourcefulness for the answer. The custom was that a childless wife must provide her husband with a servant girl. Through her maidservant, he could have a child and his name be carried on. The child would be regarded as her own. Understanding this custom from her homeland, Sarai decided that God needed her help to fulfill His promise. She tried to interpret a divine promise by means of legal provisions.

## I. We See Sarah's Special Proposal (v. 2)

It seemed to be a good and noble act on the surface, yet it was harmful in the long run.

### A. *The author of the proposal was Sarah (v. 2).*

The proposal should not have been considered. As the wife of Abram, it should have been out of the question to share the love and affection of her husband. As a daughter of faith, it should have been inconsistent with her trust in God's promise and His faithfulness. As the mistress of the household, it should have been thought harmful to her. Yet she proposed it to Abram.

*B. Though the practice was common, it didn't make it right or good.*

Even though her motive may have been good, it still didn't make it the best. She did it because of a strong desire to see Abram become the father of a great nation. Even though her self-denial was great, it still didn't make it right. She showed genuine humility in yielding to Hagar the honor of being the mother of Abram's seed. She showed great devotion to Abram in submitting to a replacement for her husband's sake. Even though the motive was right and the custom was common, even though her self-denial was great, it didn't make it right.

Sometimes we are tempted to think that God needs our help to fulfill His promises. Our plans may be good, based in love, and still be wrong for us. We may hinder God's perfect plan for us. When He promises something, don't panic if His fulfillment is delayed. When He promises, we must step back and allow Him to fulfill His promises in His way.

**ILLUS.** Dr. Judson labored diligently for six years in Myanmar (Burma) before he baptized a convert. At the end of three years, he was asked what evidence he had of

ultimate success. He replied, "As much as there is a God who will fulfill His promises." A hundred churches and thousands of converts answered his faith in God's timing.

We must trust God's promises and His timing. Sarai and Abram joined together to supposedly help God.

## II. We See Abram's Sinful Compliance (v. 2)

However, Sarai was not alone in this decision. Abram deliberately chose to be involved. Abram did not consider the consequences that would be involved. He thought about the immediate feasibility of the plan. Had Abram only dimly discerned the outcome of the plan, he would have seen that it was wrong. Sometimes in our impatience, when confronted by temptation, we become morally shortsighted. God has a plan; we must not settle for immediate satisfaction by jumping ahead of His timing.

Abram was inexcusably involved. He showed a lack of faith that God could perform a miracle. He showed a lack of spiritual discernment in supposing that what God had promised as a gift, he could deceptively snatch from His hand. His sinful compliance led to a sorrowful result.

## III. We See a Sorrowful Result (vv. 4-6)

### A. *Sinful compliance led to humiliation for Sarai (v. 4).*

Hagar was elated by the prospect of maternity, and she despised Sarai. She became arrogant and mocked Sarai.

She had contempt for Sarai's sterility by assuming an air of superiority and anticipation of replacing Sarai in Abram's love.

### B. *Sinful compliance led to misery for Abram (v. 5).*

Sarai was stung by jealousy because of the success of her plan. She was incapable of enduring the scornful triumph of Hagar. Sarai turned to Abram. She held him responsible for her humiliation and barrenness. She called down judgments of heaven on Abram. He must have suffered, seeing Sarai suffer.

### C. *Sinful compliance led to oppression for Hagar (v. 6).*

Abram unwisely gave permission to Sarai to handle Hagar any way she devised. Hagar was at once thrust back into servitude. She received all of Sarai's anger and bitterness. Hagar was deprived of any honor and affection as the mother of Abram's child. Sarai made it so difficult and unbearable that Hagar fled.

The sorrowful results were humiliation for Sarai, misery for Abram, and oppression for Hagar. The principle is clear: when we get ahead of God and try to take His promises into our own hands, we are only asking for problems. Allow God to be God. Give Him the time to work out the fulfillment in His perfect wisdom. We also need to consider the supreme revelation.



## IV. We See God's Supreme Revelation (vv. 7-13)

### A. *God sees us (v. 13).*

The name of God is Jehovah-Roi. No matter how badly we may have hindered God's plan, He still sees us. No matter how many times we have tried to jump ahead of God's timing, He still sees us. No matter how far away we are from the Promised Land, He still sees us. "For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (2 Chron. 16:9). "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne. He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them" (Ps. 11:4). God sees! "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry" (34:15). God sees and knows all about us.

**ILLUS.** A man visited a large sheep ranch in Australia at the time of shearing. During the tour, his guide took a baby lamb from its pen and placed it with thousands of other sheep where the noise of their bleating and the shouting of the shearers was absolutely deafening. The unweaned animal, looking dazed, remained still for a moment. Then, realizing it had been separated from its familiar surroundings, it began to let out weak, distressed baas. The faint cries were answered immediately by the mother, even though she was at the far end of the enclosure. As the feeble little creature began to walk slowly toward her, the old ewe rushed to meet it as if no other sheep were present. Amid the noise and confusion, she still heard the pitiful bleating of her own frightened offspring.

Referring to this incident in a sermon, a minister said, "Don't imagine that you, the object of God's special care, are ever beyond the reach of His attention. The Heavenly Father sees you as if there were no other child of His in the whole world. He bends His loving ear to your faintest call for help and hurries to your aid!"

God is Jehovah-Roi! Not only does He see, but also He cares about us.

### B. *God cares about us.*

**ILLUS.** An old custom is still in use at a certain East Coast town of England. When a ship is about to sail, the captain asks his men: "Are we all here?"

They all reply, "Yes, sir, and in God's care."

Then the captain asks, "Is there anything then to fear?"

"No, sir, nothing," they answer. Then they set sail, unafraid of the many dangers that, even in peacetime, are the lot of those who go down to the sea in ships.

God sees and cares about each one of us (Ps. 86:15-17).

### C. *God reveals himself.*

God allows us to see Him. Hagar said, "I have now seen the One who sees me" (Gen. 16:13). This is the supreme revelation. Not only does God see and care about us, but also He chooses to reveal himself to us. We can see Him. In the midst of our impatience, in the midst of our sinful compliance with the temptation that comes our way, we still serve a God who sees us, cares about us, and chooses to reveal himself to us. God is Jehovah-Roi!

## SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choruses	"How Majestic Is Your Name" "To Thee We Ascribe Glory" "The Majesty and Glory of Your Name" "Cares Chorus"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir	"Cast All Your Cares"
Reception of Tithes and Offerings	
Special	"No One Understands like Jesus"
Message	"THE GOD WHO SEES: JEHOVAH-ROI"
Invitation	"Cares Chorus"
Choral Benediction	"Now unto Him"

### *Pastoral Prayer*

"O God of hope, we come to You with hearts filled with praise because You are our God. You have created all the world around us in beauty, and we marvel at the perfection of each creature and object. As the bright sun fills us with vitality and cooling nights refresh us, we are grateful for Your loving care. As we meet and embrace the friends around us, we are mindful of Your love shown in them and praise You for their influence in our lives. You are our Desire and our Joy, and we thank You.

"We also come with hearts burdened with cares. Some of us seem to have lost sight of our hope, and we ask how to find it. Some of us are hurting physically, spiritually, or emotionally, and we ask Your healing answers for our pain. We ask You to come to us, to set us free, to lift us up on Your wings of love and care. Through this experience of worship, may we find Your way to make our lives truly Your kingdom."

—Sue Enoch

## Creative Worship Ideas

### *Offertory Sentence*

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much" (Luke 16:10).

### *Offertory Prayer*

"Teach us to know that we live not to charm You, but to obey You; not to amuse You, but to honor You; not to impress You, but to serve You; not to outsmart You, but to be fools for Your sake; not only to do good, but also to be good.

"Our offerings, however generous they may be, are at best such a poor hint of Your generous dealings with us. Our sacrifices for You, however great, are such an inadequate reflection of the sacrifice of Christ You made for us sinners, not while we were Your friends, but while we were still Your enemies. Yet it is Your nature to accept graciously whatever we lovingly give to You. Use these offerings, and us, to promote righteousness, healing, compassion, and peace. May others know that we who are Your disciples truly care about them."

—Gordon H. Reif

# THE LORD OF HOSTS

## Jehovah-Sabaoth

by David W. Graves

August 29, 1993

### INTRO:

The last name the Old Testament gives God is Jehovah-Sabaoth, or "the Lord of Hosts." It is never found in the books of Moses, Joshua, Judges, Job, Proverbs, or Ecclesiastes. It is only rarely found in Kings, Chronicles, or the Psalms. In the prophets, especially those who deal with the failure of Israel, we see this name occurring, "the Lord of hosts" (KJV and most versions).

The name seems to be used constantly when the prophets deal with the failure of God's people. In Jeremiah, it is used 83 times. In Zechariah, it is used 52 times. In the two chapters of the Book of Haggai, it is used 14 times. In Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, it is used 25 times in four short chapters—"the Lord of hosts."

This name, Jehovah-Sabaoth, was not revealed to them during their time in Egypt, nor in their wilderness experience, nor in the jubilant crossing of the Jordan River, nor as they were having the victories in the Promised Land.

It was when Israel faced the trials of life and found their strength totally inadequate; when they were not strong enough to meet the battle; when they were not able in their own strength to overcome the enemy; that God revealed himself to His people as the Lord of hosts.

In our failures, in the times when we come up miserably empty, our resources inadequate, and our weapons insufficient, God reveals himself to us as the Lord of hosts.

### I. God Is the Lord of Hosts

#### A. *God demonstrated compassion in Hannah's life.*

In 1 Samuel, God revealed His compassion to Hannah and heard her prayers and answered them.

#### B. *God developed courage in David's life.*

At the point of David's extremities, facing the giant, Goliath, David came to know that Jehovah was the Lord of hosts.

#### C. *God distributes comfort in Isaiah's life.*

When Isaiah's world seemed to crumble around him and King Uzziah was dead, God came to Isaiah and revealed himself as the Lord of hosts (Isa. 6:1-3; 8:11-14). In the times when we feel totally inadequate, when we feel things have not turned out the way we expected, when our walk with Jesus is not all we want, God comes to us and says, "I am the Lord of hosts."

### II. God Is the Lord of Hosts Throughout the Bible (2 Chron. 18:18-21)

A. *The Old Testament illustrates how God uses His hosts, angels, people, to bring about His purposes and to fulfill His plans.*

1. God used His hosts to exercise His discipline in

David (1 Chron. 21:2-16). When David disobeyed, God used an angel to bring judgment upon David and the nation of Israel.

2. God used His hosts to exercise His destruction on the king of Assyria (2 Kings 18:17; 19:21-23, 32-35).

3. God used His hosts to exercise His deliverance of Daniel in the lions' den (Dan. 6:22) and the three Hebrew children from the fiery furnace, (3:24-25).

4. God delivered Elisha from the army that was surrounding him (2 Kings 6:11-18). God used His hosts to bring deliverance to His people.

5. God used His hosts to demonstrate His devotion to His people; Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah; Hagar from the wilderness; Jacob in his sleep; and after Elijah's tremendous battle, God sent the angel to minister healing, health, strength, and encouragement to him.

a. God will use His angels to minister to His people in their times of need.

b. "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them" (Ps. 34:7).

#### B. *The New Testament illuminates this truth.*

In the New Testament, this ministry of the heavenly hosts is especially clear.

1. In Jesus Christ's life, we see angels:

a. announcing His birth to Joseph, Mary, the shepherds, and many others

b. singing at His birth

c. guiding Joseph to Egypt and back for Jesus' protection (Matt. 2:13, 19)

d. ministering to Him after His temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4:11)

e. strengthening Him in the garden when He prayed

f. rolling back the stone so that He might come forth as the resurrected Lord (Matt. 28:2, 6)

g. declaring His resurrection to Mary, Peter, John, and the disciples

b. Jesus taught His disciples to expect His hosts in their lives with Him (Matt. 26:53).

2. In the ministry of the Church, we see the Lord of hosts.

a. Peter delivered from prison (Acts 12:5-8)

b. Philip guided in the desert to meet the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26)

c. Paul saved from the storm (Acts 27:23-25)

d. John saw the heavenly hosts while a prisoner on the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:20; 3:1; 8:6-12).

3. This name is given so that we will know what tremendous, accessible help is ever near.

Our God is Jehovah-Sabaoth, the One who gives His angels charge over us, to keep and protect us.

### III. There Are Conditions to Be Met for God to Be the Lord of Hosts

*A. For angels to minister to us, there must be a need present.*

This name, "the Lord of hosts," was revealed to Israel in the midst of failures and difficulties. When Israel came to their outer extremities, that is when God revealed himself as "the Lord of hosts." If you feel you have never been ministered to by angels, it is possible that you have never come to that deep point of need. Maybe you have never needed that, or maybe you were unaware of God's providence.

**ILLUS.** Dr. V. H. Lewis was on his way to a revival in the Dakotas. It was a cold night and raining so hard he could not see past his windshield. Dr. Lewis and his father-in-law were driving along the old country road when, all of a sudden, there came a blazing fire from under the hood. He slammed on his brakes, knowing the car could explode any minute. As soon as he was ready to jump from that car, no more than 50 feet in front of him, a train came at full speed across the road. As he popped the hood and looked at his engine, there was no fire or smoke.

Dr. Lewis said that as he got back in the car and drove down the road silently, he believed that the angel of the Lord was encamped around them and sent that flame of fire to stop them, or they would have been hit by the train that would have killed them both.

Many times, we are on the brink of disaster and don't even know what we have escaped. Why? Because the angel of the Lord comes and is encamped around us. He gives us protection. In the times when we have nowhere else to turn, God says, "I will send My angels, and they will minister to you." We must first have a need.

*B. We must be living a righteous life.*

The Bible tells us, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Prov.

18:10). We who depend on God's righteousness can run to the name of the Lord of hosts. He will be our Protection. He will be our Lord of hosts. He will send His hosts to minister to us. When we come to the limit of our own strength and power, we can call out the name of the Lord of hosts. He will come to be our Fortress. Praise the name of Jehovah-Sabaoth!

#### SUGGESTED WORSHIP ORDER

Choral Introit	"Sound the Call to Praise"
Choruses	"How Excellent Is Thy Name"
	"How Majestic Is Your Name"
Hymn	"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"
Choruses	"To Thee We Ascribe Glory"
	"The Majesty and Glory of Your Name"
Pastoral Prayer	
Choir	"His Name Is a Strong Tower"
	"Almighty"
Reception of Tithes and Offerings	
Duet	"A Name I Highly Treasure"
Message	"THE LORD OF HOSTS: JEHOVAH-SABAOOTH"
Closing Song	"All the Way My Savior Leads Me"
Benediction	

#### Creative Worship Ideas

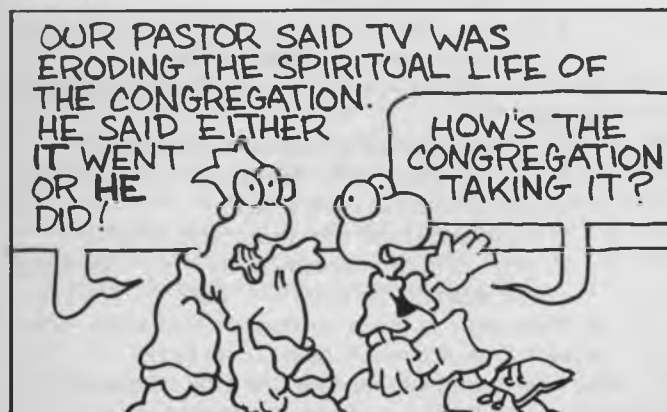
##### Offertory Sentence

"They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which he has given you" (Deut. 16:16-17, RSV).

##### Offertory Prayer

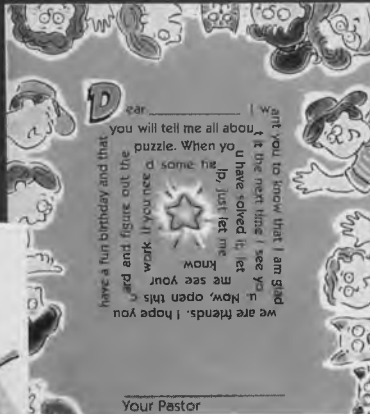
O Lord, You have blessed us in ways we cannot number or describe. Now bless us again as we bring to You these tithes and offerings, and bless all of those whose lives are touched and changed by our gifts.

### Pontius' Puddle



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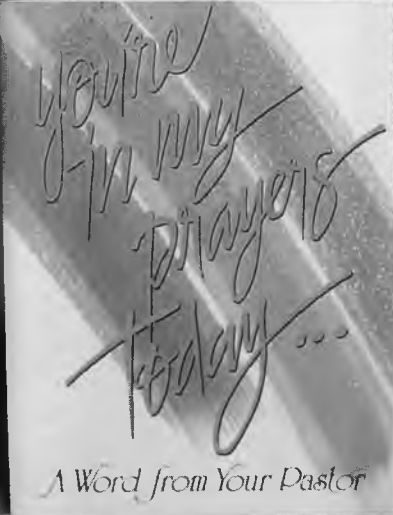
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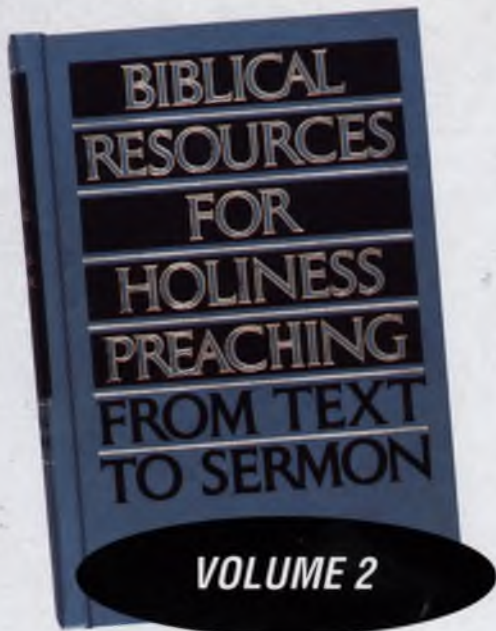
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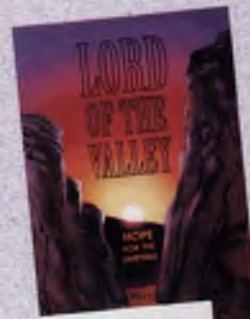
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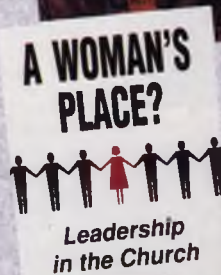


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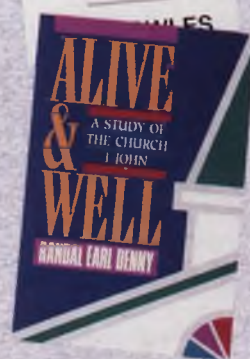


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